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THE NEW ERA IN AMERICAN POETRY

By Louis Untermeyer

THE YOUNGER QUIRE (Out of print)
FIRST LOVE (Out of print)
CHALLENGE
THESE TIMES
"—— AND OTHER POETS"
POEMS OF HEINRICH HEINE

THE NEW ERA IN AMERICAN POETRY

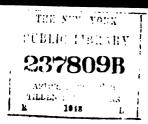
THE NEW ERA IN AMERICAN POETRY

1700

by LOUIS UNTERMEYER



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1919



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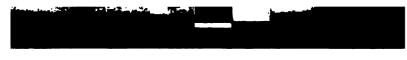
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THE QUINT & BOOKH GO. PREDE

FOR MARTIN BROTHER IN MORE THAN BLOOD



PREFATORY NOTE

This volume, purporting to be a résumé of the principal forces and figures in what has been conceded to be America's most poetic period, is a collection of articles, reviews and digressions that have appeared during the last seven or eight years. It is scarcely, however, a complete file of statistics; it pretends to be neither an academic handbook nor the encyclopaedic result of a theory that has the strut of a finality. The standpoint chosen is generally a personal one, not the aloof and olympian attitude towards art which is so often supposed to represent the true poise of criticism. It is, what criticism sometimes happens to be, an explanatory if not a conclusive summary. And yet I hope it is something more than an annotated record of preferences and prejudices.

I owe much to the many authors whose ready permission to quote has given this volume far greater authority than my own dubious dicta. I am also obligated for valuable aid to the courtesy of various publishers for permission to reprint poems which reinforce what critical value there may be in the text. I must acknowledge my debt to Henry Holt & Co. for poems taken from Robert Frost's A Boy's Will, North of Boston and Mountain Interval, from Carl Sandburg's Chicago Poems and Cornhuskers, from Roy Helton's Outcasts in Beulah Land and Margaret Widdemer's Factories; to The Macmillan Co. for the quotations from Edwin Arlington Robinson's The Man Against the

Sky. Merlin and the new edition of Captain Craig, from Amy Lowell's A Dome of Many-Colored Glass, Sword Blades and Poppy Seed, Men, Women and Ghosts and Can Grande's Castle, from Vachel Lindsay's Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty. The Congo and Other Poems and The Chinese Nightingale, from Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology, Songs and Satires, The Great Valley and Toward the Gulf, from Sara Teasdale's Rivers to the Sea and Love Songs, from Harriet Monroe's You and I, and from Conrad Aiken's Earth Triumphant: to The Century Company for their kindness in allowing me to use parts of James Oppenheim's Sonas for the New Age and War and Laughter as well as William Rose Benét's Merchants from Cathay; to Charles Scribner's Sons for extracts from Edwin Arlington Robinson's The Town down the River and Children of the Night; to Alfred A. Knopf for selections from both editions of Others-An Anthology of the New Verse, from James Oppenheim's The Book of Self, from Ezra Pound's Lustra, from Alfred Kreymborg's Mushrooms and Orrick Johns' Asphalt and Other Poems; to The Four Seas Company for passages from Conrad Aiken's The Jig of Forslin and Nocturne of Remembered Spring; to B. W. Huebsch for several poems from Alter Brody's A Family Album, from Lola Ridge's The Ghetto and a paragraph from James Oppenheim's The Beloved: to Frederick A. Stokes Co. for two poems from Witter Bynner's Grenstone Poems; to Mitchell Kennerley for portions of Edna St. Vincent Millay's Renascence, Zoe Akins' Interpretations, Max Eastman's Child of the Amasons, Vachel Lindsay's General Booth Enters into Heaven and the collection entitled Spectra; to The Yale University Press for verses

from W. R. Benét's The Falconer of God, The Great White Wall and The Burglar of the Zodiac; to G. P. Putnam's Sons for certain lines from Sara Teasdale's Helen of Troy and Other Poems; to the Hillacre Bookhouse for part of Arturo Giovannitti's Arrows in the Gale and Max Endicoff's The Snarling City; to Manas Press for several cinquains from Adelaide Crapsey's Verse; and to Albert and Charles Boni for two quotations from Des Imagistes. The selections from Anna Hempstead Branch's The Shoes That Danced and Rose to the Wind, from Edwin Arlington Robinson's Captain Craig, from John Gould Fletcher's Goblins and Pagodas, H. D.'s Sea Garden and Some Imagist Poets, are used by special permission of, and by arrangement with, Houghton Mifflin Co.

Parts of the following chapters, as I have already intimated, have done duty as causeries, reviews, articles and, in one form or another, have appeared in the columns of The New Republic, The Independent, The Review of Reviews, The Dial, The New York Evening Post, The New York Times, Poetry and Drama (London), The Chicago Evening Post, and The Liberator. I thank the editors of these publications for the privilege of using, sometimes verbatim, old material in this new format.

L.U.

New York, 1919.

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CONTENTS

Introduction—The New Spirit	r	•	•	•	•	PAGE 3
ROBERT FROST		•	•		•	15
James Oppenheim	•	•	•			41
VACHEL LINDSAY		•		•	•	65
CARL SANDBURG			•		•	95
Edwin Arlington Robinson				•		111
Amy Lowell		•	•	•		137
Edgar Lee Masters					•	161
Arturo Giovannitti				•	•	183
Ezra Pound					•	201
John Hall Wheelock .		•				215
CHARLES ERSKINE SCOTT WOOD						231
BENÉT, BYNNER AND BRODY .						241
SARA TEASDALE AND THE LYRICE	STS					263
"H. D." AND THE IMAGISTS.						291
"Отнек"				:	•	309
AND OTHERS						329
Conclusion—The Melting Pot						355
INDEX						361

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THE NEW ERA IN AMERICAN POETRY

". . . these and more branching forth into numberless branches.

Always the free range and diversity!

Always the continent of Democracy!"

Walt Whitman.

INTRODUCTION

THE NEW SPIRIT

To many, the title of this volume may need not only an introduction but an explanation. The change which has come upon all the arts with surprising suddenness seems imperceptible to them. But the strange growth is here. And the questionable fact of a new spirit is answered with sharp affirmation when we examine this curious budding, and find that it is national. For the first time. a great part of American letters is actually American. We have had, of course, music, art and literature in this country before. But it has not been, as a rule, a native growth; it has merely been transplanted and produced here. Only in a geographical sense could it be con-Until recently our paintings had sidered American. filled endless galleries with placid arrangements of Greek nudes, Italian skies and French theories. Our sculpture was mainly a set of variations of George Washington in a toga and Daniel Webster in baggy, bronze trousers. Our architecture had expressed itself in long rows of English basement houses, placing miniature Egyptian obelisks on top of office buildings and trying to make our libraries, motion-picture "palaces," and terminals look like the Campanile, the Parthenon, and the baths of Caracalla. Our music, up to the last two decades, had been a series of sentimentalized echoes of the least original of Europeans; stale drippings adulterated and sweetened by drawing-room Moodys and Sankeys-while our

genuine contributions to music (the negro spirituals, the bold aboriginal dance-rhythms, our despised "popular" tunes with their highly characteristic and energetic ragtime syncopation) had been scorned and neglected in favor of such "classics" as "The Rosary" and "A Perfect Day." The richest and most emotional of the arts, we, possibly the richest and most emotional people. have contributed no more to it than the Australians. Outside of the scores of hopeless and forgotten imitators of outworn imported modes, how many of our musicians can one name who display the slightest autocthonous or original trace? MacDowell? Here is the one name that leaps to every one's lips; the single approach to a musical genius that we actually have produced. And MacDowell is at his best when he is least indigenous; his rhythms are Norse, his indebtedness to Grieg is evident: even his "Indian Suite" reveals his ancestry through typically northern cadences and a still more typical "Scotch snap." The rest are an unimportant handful. Ethelbert Nevins? A best-seller interpretation of foreign conservatories. Charles Martin Loeffler? A diluted Debussy. Henry K. Hadley? Arthur Foote? Henry Holden Huss? George W. Chadwick? Horatio W. Parker? Competent and even accomplished academics. Their pages bear the dull aroma of the textbook; they are desiccated and musty with learning. There is never a whiff of the soil, never an accent of the people, never a suggestion of the electric energy that flows and tingles through every corner of the country.

And poetry? It differed only slightly from the other arts in its lack of national individuality; the poetic "schools" may have been more numerous but they were no more original. Examine the most famous of them,

the undoubtedly gifted New England group. of its exponents burned with a keen and racy originality, the quality which, of all American writers, none but Walt Whitman possessed: not one filled his work with the warm, intense, thrilling impact of personality that made the art of all great writers a human and enduring thing. It is hard to think of them as eager young men-there is something over-mellow about even their early effortsand a general superior similarity dulls what differences are actually there. Van Wyck Brooks, in a persuasive and penetrating chapter, writes: * "What emotions pass through an hereditary American when he calls to mind the worthies who figured in that ubiquitous, long paneled group of 'Our Poets' which occupied once so prominent a place in so many domestic interiors? Poets' were commonly six in number, kindly, graybearded, or otherwise grizzled old men. One recalls a prevailing six, with variations. Sometimes a venerable historian was included, a novelist or so, and even Bayard Taylor. Nothing could make one feel so like a prodigal son as to look at that picture."

A further study, apart from the indisputable charm and fluency of much of the poetry produced by this group, proves how truly colonial these poets were, how little they tried and how impossible it was for them to shake themselves free of foreign culture. Lowell almost achieved greatness—more than the others, he felt the dignity of native character; but when he disclosed it, he revealed only the part that was most obvious and "comic" through a dialect that is theatrical and often misrepresentative. Emerson, the most original of them,

^{*}America's Coming of Age by Van Wyck Brooks-(B. W. Huebsch).

was less of a poet than a theologian and metaphysician; his creative skill as an artist was used to intellectualize and dehumanize almost everything he touched; the original power became lost in a determined effort to translate European and especially German abstractions. Bryant, the best of our *plein air* poets, was a chilly and watercolor Wordsworth. Whittier was by turns a mild minister and a milder melodist. And regard Longfellow. I can do nothing better than to turn again to Van Wyck Brooks and quote a passage from his chapter "Our Poets":

"To Longfellow, the world was a German picturebook, never detaching itself from the softly colored pages. He was a man of one continuous mood: it was that of a flaxen-haired German student on his wanderjahr along the Rhine, under the autumn sun—a sort of expurgated German student-ambling among ruined castles and reddening vines, and summoning up a thousand bright remnants of an always musical past. His was an eminently Teutonic nature of the old school, a pale-blue melting nature; and white hair and grandchildren still found him with all the confused emotion, the charming sadness, the indefinite high proposals of seventeen;—perhaps it was because they had never been opposed, never put to the test in that so innocently successful existence of his that they persisted without one touch of disillusion, one moment of chagrin."

Perhaps the strongest factor that prevented America and these Americans from expressing themselves fully was a peculiar hypocrisy that was rooted in its old puritanism. This puritanism, with its dual code, its harsh insistence on impossible standards, on a high morality in public that every one violated in private, passed through three interesting stages. It developed first into a religious tyranny, then into a literary dictatorship and finally into the orgies of a virulent and inhibiting comstockery. from which last phase we are only now emerging. days immediately preceding the Civil War were dark with dogma and denial. The lips of the country were pursed into a continual No! The breaking of a taboo meant the ostracism not only of the man, but the suppression of all his work. Books will some day be written of the tragic resistance of Poe and Whitman, of their futile attempts to stand against the juggernaut of Philistinism that preceded the war. At no time in America was literature so unhuman, so little related to life. In his chapter on "Puritanism as a Literary Force," * H. L. Mencken mordantly analyzes the dominance of this power. Of this period he writes:

"Fenimore Cooper filled his romances, not with the people about him, but with Indians beyond the sky-line, and made them half-fabulous to boot. Hawthorne turned backward to the Puritans of Plymouth Rock; Longfellow to the Acadians and the prehistoric Indians; Emerson took flight from the earth altogether; even Poe sought refuge in a land of fantasy. It was only the frank second-raters—e.g., Whittier and Lowell—who ventured to turn to the life about them, and the banality of the result is a sufficient indication of the crudeness of the current taste, and the mean position assigned to the art of letters. This was pre-eminently the era of the moral tale, the Sunday-school book. Literature was conceived, not as a thing in itself, but merely as a handmaiden to politics or religion."

^{*}In A Book of Prefaces by H. L. Mencken—(A. A. Knopf).

And it was this sermonizing turn of mind, the habit of adding moral tags, that kept this eminently gifted group from becoming either the artistic pioneers or the prophets of a growing country that needed both. It prevented them from observing the huge, impersonal disturbances, the swift individual reactions, the clash of beauty and brutality. It made them strain their vision to ideals above the clouds and traditions across the seas. Scarcely American at all but for their habitat, the New England group did not owe nearly as much to New England as it did to old England.

But, I have been told, their faded relics have already found their places. They are safely buried in old anthologies, where they are read by no one, or ensconced as "Life Lessons" in school books for the edification of children under fifteen. This easy method of disposition is not as innocuous as it seems, for (platitude though it may be) it is the misdirected, pliant child that becomes the hard and unimaginative man. It may be a narrow aesthetic standpoint, but it is not only as a citizen that such literature harms the child, it injures him as an artist. And we are not yet so rich in the breed that we can afford to choke off the juvenile experimenter before adolescence. Every child is a mimic and a maker; he is not only a potential but an actual poet. Every healthy youngster sees things freshly, vividly, imaginatively. It is only the fact that the child is forced to exchange his fancies for formulas, to accept predetermined customs, to follow routines of thought and action, that changes his It is the pressure of parents and indirectly the whole frowning and impatient world that blurs and perverts the natural artistic instinct. The artist is first of all a child that has grown up without having his vision

Introduction

9

blurred and distorted. Poems of the insistently didactic type,—where all things in and out of nature, from a chambered nautilus to a village blacksmith, are used to point a specious and usually irrelevant moral—obfuscate and twist the normal views of the young reader until his vision becomes narrow and myopic.

But these false standards do not only affect the immature; they destroy much of the value of what we ordinarily consider our authorities. Turn to Edmund Clarence Stedman's An American Anthology-a stupendous tome of almost nine hundred pages-and see what Stedman considered the fine flower of American poetry. this gargantuan collection of mediocrity and moralizing, there are perhaps sixty pages of genuine poetry and no more than ten pages of what might be considered genuine American poetry. Whenever Stedman has erred, it has been on the side of righteousness rather than of beauty. You will find that Oliver Wendell Holmes, the polisher of breakfast-table philosophy, is actually accorded as much space as Whitman and Poe (the latter two receiving scarcely half as many pages as Longfellow or Whittier!), while Richard Hovey, the fresh and outspoken poet of Vagabondia, is given considerably less space than the precise and forgotten Richard Henry Stoddard . . . And all this as recently as 1901!

Such valuations would be impossible today. We are now in the midst of one of those tremendous spiritual upheavals when, as in every great crisis, the thought of man, grown more powerful and introspective, bursts forth in poetry. And the quality of that poetry is human, racy and vigorous; it is not only closer to the soil but nearer to the soul. Our poets have shaken them-

selves free, first of all from the pontifical rhetoric, the tag-end moralizing of our literary doctors and doctrinaires. And as they have rid themselves of the tradition of didacticism, they are growing clear of the tradition of routine romanticism.

By that I do not mean that our poets are any the less genuinely romantic. They are more so. For they are getting their romance out of themselves and their lives (like Herrick and Villon and Heine) rather than out of books or cloudy and classical legendry. There still is an undeniable beauty in the ancient myths, but to most of the living poets it is a frayed and moth-eaten beauty. Their eyes do not fail to catch the glamor of the old tales, but they turn with creative desire to more recent and less shopworn loveliness. They echo Whitman in declaring their freedom from the easy charm of antiquity:

Come, Muse, migrate from Greece and Ionia.

Cross out, please, those immensely overpaid accounts;

That matter of Troy and Achilles' wrath, and Æneas' and Odysseus' wanderings.

Placard "Removed" and "To Let" on the rocks of your snowy Parnassus . . .

For know a better, fresher, busier sphere; a wider, untried domain awaits and demands you.

Poetry has swung back to actuality, to heartiness and lustihood. And most of all, it has returned to democracy—in America, for the first time. Latterly the most exclusive and aristocratic of the arts, appreciated and fostered only by little salons and erudite groups, poetry has suddenly swung away from its self-imposed strictures and is expressing itself once more in the terms of democ-

racy. This democracy is twofold: a democracy of the spirit and a democracy of speech. This is the unifying quality that connects practically all of the poets with whom I propose to deal; it intensifies what is their inherent Americanism; it charges their varied art with a native significance. Many people reading the works of these men have found out, often to their own surprise, that they actually could read poetry. And, what is more, they discovered with even greater surprise, that they could enjoy it. No longer were they frustrated because of a lack of knowledge of recondite legends, because of an ignorance of the minor amours of the major Greek deities, or the absence of a dictionary of rare and archaic words. Life was their glossary, not literature.

Much of this enjoyment is due to the fact that our poets are coming back to the oldest and most stirring tongue; they are using a language that is the language of the people. Nor is this a mere revolt from the stilted and aestheticized speech that was the expression of a narrowed and aestheticized vision of life. They have rediscovered the beauty, the dignity, I might almost say the divine core, of the casual and commonplace. They are bringing to ordinary speech a new affection and interest, calling forth its natural warmth, its original power. It was Whitman who came with a double challenge; he assailed the intolerable prurience of the Puritans and outraged the aesthetic formalists of his period by taking his themes hot from the rude and raucous tumble of life. It was Whitman who, having lived on a rich and varied scale, touching the world (or rather, embracing it) at all extremes, gave voice and national expression to an immense and unassembled medley of races. And it was Whitman who, as Brooks aptly puts

it, "precipitated the American character. All those things which had been separate, self-sufficient, incoordinate-action, theory, idealism, business-he cast into a crucible: and they emerged harmonious and molten, in a fresh, democratic ideal, which is based upon the whole personality. Every strong personal impulse, every cooperating and unifying impulse, everything that enriches the social background, everything that impels and clarifies in the modern world owes something to Whitman." Whitman, as much the prophet as the poet, foretold this change in his little-known and highly characteristic An American Primer,* a thin sketch of a book which throws a series of illuminating side-lights on himself and his In furtherance of his belief that the whole "Leaves of Grass" was mainly a gigantic language experiment, an effort towards a democratic poetry, he said, "It is an attempt to give the spirit, the body and the man, new words, new potentialities of speech-an American, a cosmopolitan (for the best of America is the best cosmopolitanism) range of self-expression." He also wrote: "The Americans are going to be the most fluent and melodious-voiced people in the world—the most perfect users of words. . . . The new times, the new people, the new vista need a tongue accordingyes, and what is more they will have such a tongue."

And it was Whitman's use of the rich verbal material that flowered in the street rather than in libraries that gave him such potency. That large spirit was set free and made common to all men, not so much because of his form and philosophy, but because of his words. And it was this love and sublimation of what was colloquial

^{*}An American Primer by Walt Whitman. Edited by Horace Traubel—(Small, Maynard & Co.).

and racy that made him so great an artistic influence, an influence that was not only liberal but liberating. It was Whitman, more than any single element, unless one includes the indirect force of a wider social feeling, who broke the fetters of the present-day poet and opened the doors of America to him.

From what, it has been asked, has the American poet been set free? Let me say, in a sweeping generality, from a vague eloquence, from a preoccupation with a poetic past, from the repeating of echoes and glib superficials. He has been transferred to a moving world from a lifeless and literary storehouse—from an old attic of dusty mythological statues, genre paintings and embroidered mottoes. And what has he been set free for? Well, for one thing, to look at the world he lives in; to study and synthesize the startling fusion of races and ideas, the limitless miracles of science and its limitless curiosity, the growth of liberal thought, the groping and stumbling toward a genuine social democracy—the whole welter and struggle and beauty of the modern world. He has been set free to face these. For even though he tries to recreate the tunes of an antique lyricist, listening only to the echoes of a thousand years, he will find it hard to escape his times.

And that escape has become increasingly difficult. The wireless, the rural free delivery, the ubiquitous and omniscient newspapers follow him everywhere. No matter how distant his hiding-place, he cannot get away from the world's loud and restless activities; the tiniest hamlet rocks and responds to the stress of the whole world. The retreat to the ivory tower is blocked on every side.

Not that the escape is impossible; it is the artist's

power and prerogative. Like Keats, the poet may fly to a strange and soothing antiquity. Like Walter de la Mare, he can exchange the conflict of the daily encounter for a region inhabited only by children, echoes and elves. Or like Poe, he may build and populate a moonstruck and misty No Man's Land. But unless he can make his world as actual and convincing as our own, he will have failed—even in his escape, and certainly in his poetry.

And it is this difference that is shown in the temper of most of our poets; they are not anxious to escape. They are not frightened or disgusted with their times; they are fascinated by them. They are in love with their world. passionately, even painfully. It may be urged that this might be said of the first poets of any time: that the artist has always been intensely interested in his age and has, consciously or unconsciously, reflected it. And to a great extent, this is true. But, above all, what distinguishes this age from the preceding ones, is its sharp and probing quality, its insatiable lust for knowledge, its determined self-analysis. And, it is not, as in the past, the spasmodic effort of a group, or the rare interpretative power of one great mind that stands out. It is the steady drive of the mind of man now turned on itself as well as on its environment. In every field-from the artistic to the political—one sees this restless searching, this effort toward new values, toward ascertaining larger possibilities. I said before, that the artist had been set free for a clear look at his own age. It would have been truer to say that he is being set free for a clear look at himself. .

The following chapters are an attempt to record and coördinate this purpose.

ROBERT FROST

I HAVE already referred to Whitman as not only the great precipitant but as the liberator of emotions that had been too long stifled. This latter quality can scarcely be overestimated. So wide was his sweep, so grandiose his program, that he had neither the time nor the inclination to melt down and refine his amazing output. The result is that he is likely to be praised in the future as a spirit of revolt—and praised more as a pioneer, less as a poet. Lacking the self-critical and selective quality, he was often an artist by accident rather than by intention. With Whitman, the literary pendulum swung to the other extreme. Where the New England poets were all intellect. Whitman was all emotion; where they spun their moral conceits for fireside circles, he shouted a fraternal paganism to all America. If his insurgency did nothing else, at least it carried his "barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." And it was the shout, with its release of vigorous and vulgar health, that concerned him most. What is exquisite in his poetry is less Whitman than he would have cared to admit. If one searches for "the perfect phrase," "the final word." one will have to carve one's way through huge collops of raw poetry to find it. The breadth, the prodigal energy, the immense and jubilant acceptance, a roughshod faith in life and death,—these were what he left the living poets as a rich inheritance.

They took up their task where Whitman left it. He

blazed a passage; they widened it. He cleared the ground of much time-eaten and treacherous timber; they began to build. To instinct, they added ideas; from free and general affirmation, they began to particularize. They came to their task with fresh vitality and a more analytical vision. They saw, in their daily walks, a glamor that was nearer than all the heroes out of legendry; they realized that it took more than a list of great names to make a great poem and that the telling of an old story with new rhymes did not give it new life. The sentences of Synge * became suddenly prophetic: "The poetry of exaltation will be always the highest; but when men lose their poetic feeling for ordinary life and cannot write poetry of ordinary things, their exalted poetry is likely to lose its strength of exaltation, in the way men cease to build beautiful churches when they have lost happiness in building shops."

This poetic feeling for ordinary life is the bond that unites most of the younger poets of our day—in none is it expressed so simply and yet so richly as in the work of Robert Frost. The mending of a wall, the gathering of blueberries, a patch of old snow, a cow in apple-time, a dried-up brook, two people moving into a new house, a couple coming home to an old one—these things are used not as decorations or themes for moral embroidery, or incidents to be lifted to a "poetic" plane, but as pictures and happenings intrinsically beautiful, to be enjoyed not for their possibilities but for themselves. To Frost, nothing is so rounded, so satisfying as the Fact; it is the consummation of his art. In his first volume there

^{*}Preface to Poems and Translations by J. M. Synge—(Maunsel and Co., Ltd., Ireland).

is one poem that crystallizes this feeling and might stand as a symbol for all his work.

MOWING

There was never a sound beside the wood but one,
And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground.
What was it it whispered? I knew not well myself;
Perhaps it was something about the heat of the sun,
Something, perhaps, about the lack of sound—
And that was why it whispered and did not speak.
It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,
Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf:
Anything more than the truth would have seemed
too weak

To the earnest love that laid the swale in rows, Not without feeble-pointed spikes of flowers (Pale orchises), and scared a bright green snake. The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows. My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.

"The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows." At first glance this seems a bare absurdity, an easy and rather worthless trick. But observe the dozens who, lacking the making touch, have attempted it and failed miserably. It is not so difficult to write actual poetry; "factual" poetry is another matter. What betrays the average writer is its seeming simplicity. He begins honestly enough, but within two or three lines he is tottering on the edge of a banality. To avoid this, he retreats on to the familiar ground of a poeticism, turns quickly towards a cliché or a slight aesthetic exaggeration,—and tumbles suddenly into something that is neither truth nor poetry. The genuine artist rarely tries to amplify the fact; he considers himself fortunate if he can approximate it. Frost's very casual quality is what has deceived

so many of his critics into making dubious dicta in the matter of the art itself. Even some of his most ardent adherents begin and end their praises by saying, with a more or less deprecatory gesture, "Whether this is poetry or not . . ." or even more frequently, "While this may not be poetry in the strict sense . . ." and so on, to less cautious stammerings.

Waiving that glib and nebulous phrase concerning "the strict sense," which screens nothing behind its pomposity, it is the very misapprehension of an art that misleads the well-meaning and unwary. For poetry has more than one function, one manifestation, one standard. The touchstone test applied to it, is about as satisfactory as measuring a twisting river with an inflexible yard-stick. So when one comes with his inched-off and ruled notions of, let me say, "glamor," he is very likely to find none of it in these volumes. But, if he comes free of rigid prejudices, he is likely to find something else in its place; something which I believe is a sterner but even more genuine sort of "glamor." He will find, first of all, that there are surprisingly many moods that have never been reduced to poetry.

I presume that all this insistence on the fact may make Frost out to be a realist. And the defenders of Romanticism per se will have a fresh charge to level against him. But, aside from these confusing terms, I imagine that Frost would not scorn the appellation; in fact, I think he would wear it with a quaint pride. For Frost is a most romantic person, and as such, a realistic poet. By that I am far from attempting a feat in Chestertonic paradox. I merely wish to point out that the purely romantic writer is dealing in a stuff that is the general property and known secret of a multitude; the realist

must dare the commonplace, he must pick his own route among a thousand trodden paths,—a far harder task than adventuring into the fanciful where none can question him. Both travelers are after beauty; both are beckoned on by mystery. But the realist loves it, as he loves life, for its difficulties and hardships; because of its rudeness and rigors, even more than in spite of them. The romanticist is in love with ideas about life—ideas which every one loves; a more obvious beauty, a less mysterious mystery.

No explanation of this romantically informed realism could be half as clear as an illustration. From Frost's most recent volume (*Mountain Interval*) I take a poem that is not only one of his finest pictures but one of the best illustrations of his illuminating analysis:

AN OLD MAN'S WINTER NIGHT

All out of doors looked darkly in at him Through the thin frost, almost in separate stars, That gathers on the pane in empty rooms. What kept his eyes from giving back the gaze Was the lamp tilted near them in his hand. What kept him from remembering what it was That brought him to that creaking room was age. He stood with barrels round him—at a loss. And having scared the cellar under him In clomping there, he scared it once again In clomping off;—and scared the outer night, Which has its sounds, familiar, like the roar Of trees and crack of branches, common things, But nothing so like beating on a box. A light he was to no one but himself Where now he sat, concerned with he knew what, A quiet light, and then not even that. He consigned to the moon, such as she was. So late-arising, to the broken moon

As better than the sun in any case
For such a charge, his snow upon the roof,
His icicles along the wall to keep;
And slept. The log that shifted with a jolt
Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted,
And eased his heavy breathing, but still slept.
One aged man—one man—can't fill a house,
A farm, a countryside, or if he can,
It's thus he does it of a winter night.

Here we have, in an apparently inconsequential record, a picture of old age; to be more precise, of an old man. But it is neither a poem about old age as the romanticist would write it, or a study of a typical old man as the realists are supposed to draw. If nothing else is apparent, this much is evident, there is nothing typical about the poem. The old man is a particular person, the room a particular room. It is only by inflection, scarcely by implication, that one gets the empty loneliness of all old men and the cold darkness of all outdoors.

This much of the Frostian characteristic having been established, it will be more satisfactory to go back to his first volume and observe his progress in a more orderly and chronological fashion. A Boy's Will (Henry Holt & Co., 1914) is frankly a subjective volume, which the author, not so frankly, has tried to unify by a table of contents with program notes. Thus:

INTO MY OWN

The youth is persuaded that he will be rather more than less himself for having forsworn the world.

GHOST HOUSE

He is happy in society of his choosing.

MY NOVEMBER GUEST

He is in love with being misunderstood.

LOVE AND A QUESTION

He is in doubt whether to admit real trouble to a place beside the hearth with love.

and similar efforts to make the poems into a progressive program.

What really unifies the volume is nothing more binding than the spirit of youth and a groping towards an original expression. Here and there, one encounters turns of speech that are as recognizably Frost as anything in the later books. But the concentrated emotion, the close-packed psychology of North of Boston, is only suggested by such lyrics as "Into my Own," "The Tuft of Flowers" and a few others. Perhaps the most characteristic poem in the volume is one in which we have not only the feeling but the technique of Frost's latest work.

STORM FEAR

When the wind works against us in the dark, And pelts with snow The lower chamber window on the east, And whispers with a sort of stifled bark, The beast. 'Come out! Come out!'— It costs no inward struggle not to go, Ah, no! I count our strength, Two and a child. Those of us not asleep subdued to mark How the cold creeps as the fire dies at length,-How the drifts are piled, Dooryard and road ungraded, Till even the comforting barn grows far away And my heart owns a doubt Whether 'tis in us to arise with day And save ourselves unaided.

I should also like to quote a brief poem that shows Frost's lighter and more elfin quality, a mood to which I intend to refer later:

TO THE THAWING WIND

Come with rain, O loud Southwester!
Bring the singer, bring the nester;
Give the buried flower a dream;
Make the settled snow-bank steam;
Find the brown beneath the white;
But whate'er you do to-night,
Bathe my window, make it flow,
Melt it as the ices go;
Melt the glass and leave the sticks
Like a hermit's crucifix;
Burst into my narrow stall;
Swing the picture on the wall;
Run the rattling pages o'er;
Scatter poems on the floor;
Turn the poet out of door.

In North of Boston (Henry Holt & Co., 1915) Frost found his own full utterance and himself. It is, as he calls it, a "book of people." And it is more than that. It is a book of a people, of the folk of New England, of New England itself with its hard hills and harder certainties, its repressions, its cold humor and inverted tenderness. Against this background, Frost has placed some of the most poignant and dramatic poems that the age has produced, perhaps the most authentic and powerful that have ever come out of America. These dramas, sometimes in dialog, sometimes in monolog, are the antithesis of the "arranged" and carefully planned pieces of stagecraft. There is a total absence of fine feathers and fustian, of red lights and rhetoric, of all the skilful literary mechanics that we have been used to. Discarding

these theatrical accessories, Frost has taken the drama out into the air: he lets the sunlight play over his scenes and allows his actors to talk in a language that is rich and living, imaginative in its very adherence to reality. No one but Synge has put so much of the sharp tang of life into dramatic poetry; and here, as in Synge's work, every speech is as "fully flavored as a nut or an apple," a language that is both colloquial and colorful. Another thing that gives these poems so potent an illusion of reality is the absence of the guiding hand of the creator; the figures live and breathe and move of their own desire and necessity. And they are illumined by nothing so much as an intense sympathy that may easily be considered a brilliant psychology. This light does not merely set off his figures. It penetrates them. It reaches down through his people to their roots; it strikes the soil from which they grew. It even transforms the whole countryside and makes it something more than an effective background. It gives his setting the power of an immense and moving actor in the lives of the folk it overshadows.

Turn to the first poem in North of Boston and witness the interplay of character and country:

MENDING WALL

Something there is that doesn't love a wall, That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it, And spills the upper boulders in the sun; And makes gaps even two can pass abreast. The work of hunters is another thing; I have come after them and made repair Where they have left not one stone on a stone, But they would have the rabbit out of hiding, To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean, No one has seen them made or heard them made,

But at spring mending-time we find them there. I let my neighbor know beyond the hill; And on a day we meet to walk the line And set the wall between us once again. We keep the wall between us as we go. To each the boulders that have fallen to each. And some are loaves and some so nearly balls We have to use a spell to make them balance: "Stav where you are until our backs are turned!" We wear our fingers rough with handling them. Oh, just another kind of out-door game, One on a side. It comes to little more. There where it is we do not need the wall: He is all pine and I am apple orchard. My apple trees will never get across And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him. He only says, "Good fences make good neighbours."

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
"Why do they make good neighbours? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are
no cows.

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down." I could say "Elves"
to him,

But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good
neighbours."

Beneath the sheer whimsy and loveliness of poetic expression, we have here, in two pages, color, character, and the contrasted souls of two people. And here a rather strange thing is encountered. Many of Frost's most striking characters are revealed in a single line; some of them without even a word. In this poem. for instance, the portrayal of the second person is fully as keen as that of the speaker, though it is suggested rather than drawn. The man who insists that "Good fences make good neighbours" stands out as clearly as though the artist had put in every wrinkle and trouser-crease. In his stolid reiteration of the one sentence, one sees his father behind him and his father's fathers stretching back in a vague row; a whole line of unquestioning, dogmatizing generations. And it is after one has finished the poem, that its power persists and grows. It takes on the quality of a natural symbolism; of two elemental and opposed forces. In its dispute about border-lines, we have the essence of nationalism vs. the internationalist. Beneath the whimsical anarchy of the one and the blind, literal insistence of the other, one senses the endless struggle between a pagan irresponsibility and a strict accountability. It is not just a conflict between the old and the new New England; it is an echo of natures as primitive as Law and Revolution.

If here is an instance of how much power and personality can be condensed in one spoken line, it will be interesting to observe how several of Frost's characterizations do not speak, do not even appear. The high-hearted adventurer in "The Wood-Pile," for instance; that unknown, careless rover, continually turning to fresh tasks. Or the worn-out incompetent in "The Death of the Hired Man," possibly the finest piece of genre paint-

ing ever attempted in our poetry. Or that positive tightlipped old lady in "The Black Cottage."

Turn now to the longer delineations. To "A Servant to Servants," a quiet and terrible study of insanity, the dull degeneration of a life that was already dragged down. Or "Home Burial," a domestic tragedy that is the more terrible since nothing happens, a poem that is worthy to stand beside "The Death of the Hired Man." Or "The Fear," where, after a threatening beginning, the poem moves to a terrific climax that—But I must illustrate by particulars, even though I mutilate and mangle the poem in the attempt.

THE FEAR

A lantern light from deeper in the barn
Shone on a man and woman in the door
And threw their lurching shadows on a house
Near by, all dark in every glossy window.
A horse's hoof pawed once the hollow floor,
And the back of the gig they stood beside
Moved in a little. The man grasped a wheel,
The woman spoke out sharply, "Whoa, stand still!"
"I saw it just as plain as a white plate,"
She said, "as the light on the dashboard ran
Along the bushes at the roadside—a man's face.
You must have seen it too."

"I didn't see it.

Are you sure-"

Here, on the first page, we have Frost's great gift of concentration. Here, in eight lines, the stage is set, the background vitalized, the drama begun; the incidental noises become significant. The fear has already taken shape. It does not need more than a few lines to reveal that what the woman constantly dreads is that her hus-

band will some day come and find her. Swiftly her suspicion mounts to certainty. This time it was some one. She summons all her strength and

"What do you want?" she cried to all the dark. She stretched up tall to overlook the light That hung in both hands hot against her skirt.

"There's no one; so you're wrong," he said.

"There is .-

What do you want?" she cried, and then herself Was startled when an answer really came.

"Nothing." It came from well along the road.

She reached a hand to Joel for support: The smell of scorching woollen made her faint.

"What are you doing round this house at night?"

"Nothing." A pause: there seemed no more to say.

And then the voice again: "You seem afraid. I saw by the way you whipped up the horse. I'll just come forward in the lantern light And let you see."

"Yes, do.-Joel, go back!"

She stood her ground against the noisy steps. That came on, but her body rocked a little.

"You see," the voice said.

"Oh." She looked and looked.

"You don't see-I've a child here by the hand."

"What's a child doing at this time of night-?"

"Out walking. Every child should have the memory Of at least one long-after-bedtime walk. What, son?"

"Then I should think you'd try to find Somewhere to walk—"

"The highway as it happens—We're stopping for the fortnight down at Dean's."

"But if that's all—Joel—you realize—You won't think anything. You understand? You understand that we have to be careful. This is a very, very lonely place.
Joel!" She spoke as if she couldn't turn.
The swinging lantern lengthened to the ground, It touched, it struck it, clattered and went out.

The dénouement here is far more powerful than any physical violence could be. The whole force of the ending is in the anti-climax; the appearance, not of any "avenging" husband, but of a passing distinterested Tense and high-pitched to meet the dreaded encounter, the sudden wave of relief saps all her strength and, calling on Joel for support, she faints. It seems incredible that any one should miss the crashing effect of this ending, yet I have seen critics (and admirers) of this poem who insist on making a bloody melodrama out of it, identifying the stranger with Retribution in the form of a betraved husband—like a play by Strindberg "adapted" by Sardou. The whole power of this poem, like many of Frost's, is that nothing that could happen physically would be half as terrible or as tragic as the mental uncertainty and the fact that nothing happens.

All this must make the mature poetry of Robert Frost seem determinedly grim, and this indeed is one of the

favorite charges brought against his work. It is an easy generality, one that is difficult to dislodge; especially from the mind of those who, having uttered a theory, find it superfluous to prove it. The truth is that Frost is grim and he is also gay; he is matter-of-fact and extraordinarily fanciful—he is, in short, the many-mooded creature that most sensitive human beings are. To those who believe he is "neither humorous nor quaint," I could point out half a dozen poems like "After Apple-Picking" in this volume alone that fulfil the promise of the light fantasies in his first volume. (We shall see, in the next volume, how this strain persists and grows.) The quality of humor seeps through "Mending Wall" in a delicate irony; it tinges "The Generations of Men" and "The Mountain" with a sharper flavor; it takes on the tone of a jovial narrative that is about to break into a laugh in "A Hundred Collars," while "The Code" is not much more (or less) than an elaborated joke. Nor is this humor a furtive or recondite matter. I have heard audiences of the most sober-minded citizens punctuate "A Hundred Collars" with chuckling. These things are so downright and obvious that many have employed all sorts of ingenious explanations to account for their subtlety. They spring from the tough roots of a race.

This matter of humor brings in again the question of speech and, more particularly, of inflection. One of the other criticisms heard less frequently is that his poems are not essentially of New England, since Frost does not use dialect. Here we are back at the romanticist fallacy. For "dialect" per se is not at all typical of New England today; the only place where one can be sure of hearing it is in bucolic revivals of "The Old Homestead" and at the Palace Vaudeville Theater in New York.

But the thing goes deeper; for dialect is not a mere matter of abbreviations and a few typographical tricks. It is, particularly in Frost's case, inherent in the way that the words are grouped and shape themselves. Here we have speech so arranged and translated that the speaker is heard on the printed page; any reader will be led by the very kind and color of these words into reproducing the actual tone in which they are supposed to be uttered. It is this insistence that "all poetry is the reproduction of the tones of actual speech" that gives these poems not merely a quickly-communicated emotional appeal but the deepest power of which words are capable —the power to transmit significant and individualized sounds. Such sounds are only significant when the words which they form still retain most of their original value; they are strongest when the word is still racy and active. When they have had the original strength or beauty wrung out of them (in the way that "grand," "wonderful," "daybreak" and "lovely" have suffered), the words are not only empty as sounds, they are colorless even in their literal application. Alice's paraphrase is not only a practical but a poetical bit of advice concerning words: "Take care of the sounds and the sense will take care of itself." But one must actually take care of them, treasure them, conserve them; not squander the sounds with the senseless prodigality of a Swinburne. "Sometimes I have my doubts of words altogether," wrote Frost in what might be called an unofficial document, "and I ask myself what is the place of them. They are worse than nothing unless they do something; unless they amount to deeds as in ultimatums or battle-cries. They must be flat and final like the show-down in poker, from which there is no appeal. My definition of poetry

(if I were forced to give one) would be this: words that have become deeds."

In the light of these conclusions, it is doubly informative to turn to Mountain Interval (Henry Holt & Co., 1916). Here again we have Frost writing about New England in a way that expresses more than New England. We have the same rich and simple language, the sharp disclosure of character, the honesty of values. Frost—and this recent volume is an added proof—is the one living poet who has never padded a phrase, never larruped an emotion. Here again we find the poet who extends our literary borders not only with fresh sight but with fresh sounds. These sounds, let in from the vernacular, are full of a robust and creative energy; they are red corpuscles to the pallid blood of our "poetic" speech. This vigor of words is evident all through the volume. but it surges violently through the powerful drama "Snow" and fairly leaps from the pages of "Birches," with its personal and picturesque revelation:

BIRCHES

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.
Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load.

32

And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed

So low for long, they never right themselves: You may see their trunks arching in the woods Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair Before them over their heads to dry in the sun. But I was going to say when Truth broke in With all her matter-of-fact about the icestorm (Now am I free to be poetical?) I should prefer to have some boy bend them As he went out and in to fetch the cows— Some boy too far from town to learn baseball, Whose only play was what he found himself, Summer or winter, and could play alone. One by one he subdued his father's trees By riding them down over and over again Until he took the stiffness out of them, And not one but hung limp, not one was left For him to conquer. He learned all there was To learn about not launching out too soon And so not carrying the tree away Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise To the top branches, climbing carefully With the same pains you use to fill a cup Up to the brim, and even above the brim. Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish, Kicking his way down through the air to the ground. So was I once myself a swinger of birches. And so I dream of going back to be. It's when I'm weary of considerations, And life is too much like a pathless wood Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs Broken across it, and one eye is weeping From a twig's having lashed across it open. I'd like to get away from earth awhile And then come back to it and begin over. May no fate willfully misunderstand me And half grant what I wish and snatch me away

Not to return. Earth's the right place for love: I don't know where it's likely to go better. I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree, And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more, But dipped its top and set me down again. That would be good both going and coming back. One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

The new volume, in spite of its less imposing appearance. is the work of a rounder and still growing personality; it is an intensification of those qualities that were so eminent in North of Boston. It is rich in the blend of fact and fancy; of the intermingling of scenic loveliness and a psychological liveliness. So free and rushing a narrative as "The Bonfire" is an illustration. And it is because of his quiet vigor and unpretentious versatility that one is likely to forget how subtle and wide-spreading his apparent restrictions are. While most of his confrères have been shouting a defiant radicalism or attitudinizing before their own brilliant innovations, he has gone on without change or challenge, a more daring innovator than any of them. Now, twenty years after his first efforts to bring the sound and color of actual speech back to poetry, a countryful of poets are themselves discovering what Frost has been dealing in, unheard and unheralded, ever since 1895. Nothing could better illustrate this pungent, talk-flavored and unliterary blank verse than "Out, Out-" and "In the Home Stretch." One was, I repeat, prepared for this. But one came upon the lyrics with a kind of wonder. And yet they were the natural outcome of the first volume, a fuller and maturer expression of A Boy's Will. It is a surprising thing to see how little Frost has been in-

fluenced by any other poet and how little he has changed from the attitude assumed in his first book. The idiom has been deepened, the note amplified, the convictions have grown stronger. But the essential thing has remained as he himself prophetically summed it up in the very first poem of the first book:

They would not find me changed from him they knew—Only more sure of all I thought was true.

Nothing in all three volumes, to return to Mountain Interval, is more beautiful and poignant than these lyrics, than "An Old Man's Winter Night," which I have already quoted, the seeming inconsequence of "A Patch of Old Snow" (a poem which gives, more marvelously than any lines in our language, the effect of sheer tiredness) and the intensity of the little sequence called "The Hill Wife." Here are two of the latter series:

HOUSE FEAR

Always—I tell you this they learned—Always at night when they returned To the lonely house from far away To lamps unlighted and fire gone gray, They learned to rattle the lock and key To give whatever might chance to be Warning and time to be off in flight: And preferring the out- to the in-door night, They learned to leave the house-door wide Until they had lit the lamp inside.

THE OFT-REPEATED DREAM

She had no saying dark enough For the dark pine that kept Forever trying the window-latch Of the room where they slept. The tireless but ineffectual hands
That with every futile pass
Made the great tree seem as a little bird
Before the mystery of glass!

It never had been inside the room,
And only one of the two
Was afraid in an oft-repeated dream
Of what the tree might do.

These two poems remind me that I must return briefly to the disputed matter of Frost's "gray outlook." If no other proof to the contrary were offered, this one volume would be sufficient to upset the glib charge. Here the humor has a lighter flow, a more genial and happier undercurrent. The mirth, as well as the music, is mellower. And we observe more clearly an unabashed delight in whimsical play, in a fooling along with his theme; a characteristic to which I have already drawn attention. It is seen quite plainly in "Christmas Trees" and, in other phases, in the quaint silhouette in "An Encounter"; as a modern quasi-Elizabethan conceit in "The Telephone"; in the sly, self-satirizing, mock-pitying tone in "The Road Not Taken"; in the broad, bucolic humor of

THE COW IN APPLE TIME

Something inspires the only cow of late
To make no more of a wall than an open gate,
And think no more of wall-builders than fools.
Her face is flecked with pomace and she drools
A cider syrup. Having tasted fruit,
She scorns a pasture withering to the root.
She runs from tree to tree where lie and sweeten
The windfalls spiked with stubble and worm-eaten.
She leaves them bitten when she has to fly.
She bellows on a knoll against the sky.
Her udder shrivels and the milk goes dry.

Against this etching, in a totally different manner though not in an altogether dissimilar mood, I would like to set the half-querulous, half-heroic poem that forms a sort of careless epilog to the volume in

THE SOUND OF THE TREES

I wonder about the trees. Why do we wish to bear Forever the noise of these More than another noise So close to our dwelling place? We suffer them by the day Till we lose all measure of pace, And fixity in our joys, And acquire a listening air. They are that that talks of going But never gets away; And that talks no less for knowing, As it grows wiser and older. That now it means to stay. My feet tug at the floor And my head sways to my shoulder Sometimes when I watch trees sway, From the window or the door. I shall set forth for somewhere. I shall make the reckless choice Some day when they are in voice And tossing so as to scare The white clouds over them on. I shall have less to say. But I shall be gone.

Since the appearance of Mountain Interval, Frost has written several remarkable poems although he has published only a few. Self-critical to an almost inhibiting degree, he has never printed a half-finished or merely competent piece of work; he has less of the cacoethës

scribendi than any living author. His severity of standard is seen not only in the comparatively small quantity of his work and in its high character but in the quality of his recent verse, which seems more intricately made and more scrupulously polished than ever. He continues to cut down his phrases without ever attenuating them. One of his latest poems is, at the same time, one of the most poignant pieces inspired by the war and a superbly dramatic example of condensation. I quote this brief and powerfully suggestive picture from The Yale Review:

NOT TO KEEP

They sent him back to her. The letter came
Saying . . . and she could have him. And before
She could be sure there was no hidden ill
Under the formal writing, he was in her sight—
Living.—They gave him back to her alive—
How else? They are not known to send the dead—
And not disfigured visibly. His face?
His hands? She had to look—to ask
"What was it dear?" And she had given all
And still she had all—they had—they the lucky!
Wasn't she glad now? Everything seemed won,
And all the rest for them permissible ease.
She had to ask "What was it dear?"

Yet not enough. A bullet through and through High in the breast. Nothing but what good care And medicine and rest—and you a week, Can cure me of to go again." The same Grim giving to do over for them both. She dared no more than ask him with her eyes How was it with him for a second trial. And with his eyes he asked her not to ask. They had given him back to her, but not to keep.

I do not want to end these considerations without a reference to Frost's supposed lack of "imaginative outbursts," of his inability to write "fine passages and haunting lines." All of the volumes will yield their quota of "purple patches," if one cares to look for them; and as for memorable lines, Mountain Interval alone is fairly studded with them. But they are not mere isolated jewels, lovely incongruities in an irrelevant setting. They arise from the scene and situation even more than from the poet's consciousness; they are full of common attributes that are even more haunting for being human. Take this from "The Oven Bird":

The bird would cease and be as other birds But that he knows in singing not to sing. The question that he frames in all but words Is what to make of a diminished thing.

Or this one line from that almost deprecating tribute "Hyla Brook":

· We love the things we love for what they are.

Or this, from the ending of "The Bonfire":

"Haven't you heard what we have lived to learn? Nothing so new—something we had forgotten: War is for everyone, for children too.

I wasn't going to tell you and I mustn't.

The best way is to come up hill with me And have our fire and laugh and be afraid."

Or this from "The Death of the Hired Man":

Part of a moon was falling down the west,
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.
Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw
And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand

Among the harp-like morning-glory strings, Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves, As if she played unheard the tenderness That wrought on him beside her in the night.

Or this unforgettable fragment from the same poem:

"Home is the place where, when you have to go there,

They have to take you in."

"I should have called it Something you somehow haven't to deserve."

Or these last lines from "The Wood-Pile" describing a cord of maple left

To warm the frozen swamp as best it could With the slow smokeless burning of decay.

Never, one can readily see, are these sentences an intellectual exercise or the result of purely cerebral activity. Even the poems they illumine are not primarily thoughtful poems, for poetry that has its inception and impetus in the intellect usually remains there. The living poem is something that is felt first and thought out afterwards. "It begins," Frost had said somewhere, "with a lump in the throat; a home-sickness or a love-sickness. reaching-out toward expression; an effort to find fulfilment. A complete poem is one where an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words." In this sentence lies the explanation of Frost's persuasiveness and power. He has given emotion, thought and words such national flavor and freshness that no poet since Whitman has been more American and, in his very localism, more universal.

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JAMES OPPENHEIM

PERHAPS the most violent contrast to the poetry of Robert Frost is the poetry of James Oppenheim. And a comparison of their work shows, more than a whole series of lectures, how great a sweep is encompassed by the new spirit in our literature. For Oppenheim's poetry, though far less local and direct, is no less indigenous. It is not so obviously but fully as temperamentally American. In its vehemence, its energy, its almost deification of the national libido, there is expressed the America that is impelled by vitality. And beneath its rude vigor, Oppenheim catches and reflects the vision that drives it.

At the advent of the twentieth century, the blaze of new tendencies with its flame of social responsibility caught up and destroyed the clutter of discarded routine. dry formalism and its moldy accumulations. And poetry was the first to spread the rejuvenating blaze. poetry was already prepared for the bright flood; in a sense, it had helped to prepare it. The gilt and tinsel erotics, the romanticism that began with an air of delicate artificiality and ended with an air of delicate futility, the over-nice concern for shades and elaborate preciosity. the fastidiousness of emotion-all these vanished when the voice of Whitman swept like a fiery wind over the fields of poetry. When that great gust bore with it a warmer and more human singing, the affectations, the nostalgic airs were hushed; the limp lilies withered and the lean, lithe Liliths stopped quoting Rossetti and were

no longer engaged in descending golden staircases. Poetry was not only revived; it was regenerated.

Whitman left no immediate literary descendants. (Horace Traubel was too much the microscopic Boswell to be anything but a possible heir by default.) while, it seemed that his influence would be felt and dissipated through purely aesthetic channels, that the message he brought would become a parlor dissertation; that his argument for freedom would end in an argument about form. But suddenly the interpreters and disciples sprang up, first abroad, and finally here. Few of them did more than reiterate weakly what Whitman had said far more powerfully. None of them carried his vision or his philosophy to its natural social (and even psychical) conclusion. Only one poet has attempted it thoroughly. And James Oppenheim, starting from the Whitman foundation, has reared his own imposing and native structure.

Oppenheim's first book (Monday Morning and Other Poems, Sturgis & Walton Co., 1909) was, like most first volumes, a tentative affair. But even a casual reading disclosed a personality struggling beneath self-imposed limitations. Almost all of the poems in the volume are in formal meters, and Oppenheim is not at his best, not wholly himself, in the strict forms. The utterance is cramped, the freedom tethered and the message is caught in its own coils. Or rather, if I may change the confining metaphor, it is coughed out between fits of stammering and gusts of eager eloquence. The very force of his earnestness carries his purpose through such word-choked and awkwardly rhymed poems as "New York, from a Skyscraper," "The Ice Cream Saloon," "Monday Morning," "The Child" and "The Cry of Man."

Sometimes the form is even more rigorously set down and, strangely enough, the result is not only more musical but more intellectually clarified. Witness "The Trolley Lovers," "Mountaintop," "A Song of Labor" and "The Excursion Boat," with its buoyant opening:

We split the running seas apart,
We storm into the roaring gale—
Storm-music shakes the mighty heart,
Our fingers tremble on the rail.
The long ship pulses to her rods;
Her pennants fly, she takes the seas
As though she bore a thousand gods
To new Hesperides!

And note "Saturday Night," possibly the most pictorial and, at the same time, the most proletarian expression of this series, from which I take two verses:

The leather of shoes in the brilliant casement sheds a lustre over the heart—

The high-heaped fruit in the flaring basement glows with the tints of a Turner's art—

Darwin's dream and the eye of Spencer saw not such a gloried race

As here, in the copper light intenser than desert sun, glides face by face.

This drab washwoman, dazed and breathless, ray-chiselled in the golden stream,

In a magic statue standing deathless—her tub and soapsuds touched with dream.

Yes, in this people, glamour-sunnied, democracy wins heaven again—

Here the unlearned and the unmoneyed laugh in the lights of Lover's Lane!

But even in this early collection, there are plenty of evidences that Oppenheim realized he was not one of

those who profit by the restraints of the stanza, who are actually set free in the confines of rhyme and a fixed rhythm. Already there are signs of dissatisfaction with the precise meters, experiments in vers libre, efforts to give his emotion deeper channels. One sees him groping in uncharted rhythms, stumbling through the wordiness of such free-rhyming attempts as "Morning in Central Park," saving himself from many a slippery passage in "The Marriage Hymn" and finally striking a sure stride in "The Lincoln-Child." He has not yet the courage to abandon rhyme, but he is no longer using it as an ornament or a musical punctuation. Finally in the last section of the book, we hear the breaking of bonds. These excerpts from an uncompleted dramatic poem ("Adam and Eve") are experiments in freedom, the shattering of old molds and the shaping of new ones. At first the pattern differs little from the accustomed variety; the rhythms are still fairly regular—a loose blank verse as it might have been written by Whitman-(vide "I am Rocked in the Cradle of Love" and "Under the Leaves of the Maple"), but they grow more varied and vigorous beginning with the exhilarating:

O henceforth I shall go
Strewing the earth with God!
O henceforth I shall leap
Down twenty valleys and fly
With this woman over the hills—
We shall light the woods with music;
We shall smite the cliffs with song!

continuing through "Eve's Song" and the gradual crescendo of "Sunrise on the Mountain Top."

This section served not only as a liberating finale for

Oppenheim's first volume, but as a preparation for the next. In Songs for the New Age (The Century Co., 1014) the uncertainty has disappeared. The stammering has gone, the consonantal jars, the suspensions and uncouth dissonances have resolved, and we are listening to a speech that, sounding at times like a modulation of the Whitmanic sonority, develops a music that is strangely Biblical and yet (or perhaps I might better write, and therefore) native. It is an individual speech: it is Oppenheim; and it is the expression of an ancient people reacting to modernity, of a race in solution. sense this poetry is a flare-back; it runs through forgotten centuries and brings buried Asia to busy America. It brings the blend of violence and vision; it adds the gift of prophecy to pragmatic purpose; it has the power of summoning the creative past as well as evoking the uncreated future. It is this that clothes Oppenheim's colloquial words with ancient dignity and makes them echo the simplicity and strength of many of the Psalms; it relates them with something more than blood-relationship to such Oriental outbursts as the Book of Job. It is this Semitic enthusiasm, this racial and religious ecstasy (to which I will refer later) that makes Songs for the New Age a unique contribution to American literature.

This volume, like all of Oppenheim's subsequent work, is something more than a book of poetry. It is a slow searching that goes on beneath the musical and literary surface of all the poems; an attempt to diagnose the twisted soul of man and the twisted times he lives in. Plainly influenced by the discoveries of Freud and Jung, it attempts to express in poetry what the former has done in his Psycopathology of Everyday Life and the latter in Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido (trans-

lated by Dr. Beatrice M. Hinkle under the title of Psychology of the Unconscious.) But it is no mere translating of these studies into "polyrhythmical" lines; it is a dithyrambic celebration of life conditioned by a knowledge of how vainly and how vapidly most men live. In this work Oppenheim reveals the world conflict within one's self; it is an attempt to assemble the elements of gigantic struggles and synthesize them. The poem "We Dead," in the first section, is the crux of the volume; it is its eloquent argument. It is a passionate protest against the stolidity and indifference of man, against dull acceptance, against a method of existence that has not even dared its greatest possibilities. It is impossible to suggest by any part of this poem the passion of it, but I take a fragment ruthlessly to indicate the mood:

We dead! awake!

Kiss the beloved past good-by,

Go leave the love-house of the betrayed self,

And through the dark of birth go and enter the soul's bleak weather. . . .

And I, I will not stay dead, though the dead cling to me.

I will put away the kisses and the soft embraces and the walls that encompass me,

And out of this womb I will surely move to the world of my spirit.

I will lose my life to find it, as of old,

Yea! I will turn from the life-lie I lived to the truth I was wrought for;

And I will take the creator within, sower of the seed of the race,

And make him a god, shaper of civilizations . . .

Now on my soul's imperious surge, Taking the risk, as of death, and in deepening twilight, I ride on the darkening flood and go out on the waters Till over the tide comes music, till over the tide the breath Of the song of my far-off soul is wafted and blown, Murmuring commandments . . .

Oh, Life, of which I am part; Life, from the depths of the heavens.

That ascended like a water-spring into David of Asia on the eastern hills in the night,

That came like a noose of golden shadow on Joan in the orchard,

That gathers all life: the binding of brothers into sheaves: That of old kneelers in the dust

Named, glorying: Allah, Jehovah, God.

The book is divided into three sections: "We Dead,"—the burden of customs and fears under which we sink far too willingly; "We Living,"—the welter of passions, the struggle through uncertain conflicts out of ignorance; "We Unborn,"—the release to a triumphant confidence, to the infinite potentialities of life. It is the modern singer speaking like one of his own prophets who, in such vehemence, can revile and promise in the same breath. And it is the prophet, speaking with the authority of the poet, who can say of "Priests":

Priests are in bad odour,
And yet there shall be no lack of them.
The skies shall not lack a spokesman,
Nor the spirit of man a voice and a gesture . . .

Not garbed nor churched, Yet, as of old, in loneliness and anguish, They shall come eating and drinking among us, With scourge, and pity, and prayer.

Or, in a less exalted but even more fiery speech, we have the old Isaiah note in such a poem as:

THE SLAVE

They set the slave free, striking off his chains of the latest the was as much of a slave as ever.

He was still chained to servility,

He was still manacled to indolence and sloth,

He was still bound by fear and superstition,

By ignorance, suspicion, and savagery

His slavery was not in the chains,

But in himself.

They can only set free men free . . . And there is no need of that. Free men set themselves free.

Or turn to "Patterns," that harsh denunciation, or "The Clinging Arms," or "A Handful of Dust" and witness as further proofs of this religious universality, a creedless ecstasy which is expressed so fully in

TASTING THE EARTH

In a dark hour, tasting the Earth.

As I lay on my couch in the muffled night, and the rain lashed my window,

And my forsaken heart would give me no rest, no pause and no peace,

Though I turned my face far from the wailing of my bereavement . . .

Then I said: I will eat of this sorrow to its last shred, I will take it unto me utterly,

I will see if I be not strong enough to contain it . . . What do I fear? Discomfort?

How can it hurt me, this bitterness?

The miracle, then!
Turning toward it, and giving up to it,
I found it deeper than my own self...
O dark great mother-globe so close beneath me...
It was she with her inexhaustible grief.

Ages of blood-drenched jungles, and the smoking of craters, and the roar of tempests,

And moan of the forsaken seas.

It was she with the hills beginning to walk in the shapes of the dark-hearted animals,

It was she risen, dashing away tears and praying to dumb skies, in the pomp-crumbling tragedy of man . . .

It was she, container of all griefs, and the buried dust of broken hearts,

Cry of the christs and the lovers and the child-stripped mothers,

And ambition gone down to defeat, and the battle overborne, And the dreams that have no waking . . .

My heart became her ancient heart:

On the food of the strong I fed, on dark strange life itself: Wisdom-giving and sombre with the unremitting love of ages . . .

There was dank soil in my mouth, And bitter sea on my lips, In a dark hour, tasting the Earth.

It may be well to pause here for a moment and consider one of the main objections to this type of poetry in general and to Oppenheim's in particular. The objection is that it is too thoughtful, that it tries to teach something, to embody a message. This, it is claimed, is a betrayal of the true functions of art. The artist, cry these literary bourbons, should not try to prove anything; his sole business is to see, to record or create beautiful and precious things. The growth of a democratic spirit disturbs these aristogogues. They forget that the art of the people is growing faster and deeper than genteel art; that the personal feeling which has its roots in religious passion is the dominant force of most great work. Every artist has dared to polish and edit the crude manuscript of life; he is, at his best, a kind of

50

religiously inspired proof-reader. It has become increasingly evident that the artist is an unusually sensitive medium; sensitive not only to what he looks at, but what looks at him. And as all art is a human activity, a glorified communication, the artist (projected, let us say, by the subconscious need of the race) desires most deeply to express what the world most deeply needs to have expressed. So art becomes not a mere specializing of perceptions but a sharing of life. It is this communism of experience that we find not only in the best poetry of our day but in the great art of all time. It explains the fact that the artist can be both Apollonian and Dionysian; that he can be at one time the actor on the stage, the prompter in the wings and the critic in the first row.

This opposition to the "art for art's sake" theory comes with particular force from Oppenheim as a Jew. Few Jews have ever lived that did not regard themselves as the bringer of a message and their art but the instrument to make it heard. The Jew's business, ever since the days of Abraham, has been religion, and the art that embodied it has been correspondingly social. They have come to consider themselves not only a peculiarly favored race that persists through (and even thrives on) prejudice and persecution, but, with a naïve faith in their destiny, have taken it for granted that they were sent abroad to be teachers, pathfinders, lightbringers. Even so lyric a poet as Heine wrote "Poetry to me has always been a divine plaything. . . . And if you would honor me, lav a sword rather than a wreath upon my coffin for I was ever a fearless soldier in the war for the liberation of mankind." What is all the stupendous music of the Old Testament but a glorification not so much of God but of what is godlike in man? It is the sublimation that David sought; it is in the angry thunders of Jeremiah, it prompts the rich and sensual imagery of the Song of Songs, it impels the lashing questions and the majestic answers in the Book of Job.

And it is the spirit of Job that is in the blood of the Jews today. It is this blend of fiery dissatisfaction, sublime assurance and deep ironism that keeps them what they were; that makes them doubt and disbelieve all things and believe somehow in everything. So it is natural that a Jew (one of the race that was both a Godmaker and God-breaker) should again unite in poetry the old iconoclasm and still older worship. In the work of Oppenheim the marriage of religion and science is celebrated, with truly Semitic eagerness, even before the union is consummated. Here one sees no placid, intangible Jehovah, but a God working among men; the toiling Infinite, the Deity in overalls. Oppenheim reioices to see the Creator struggling toward man's salvation, and incidentally His own. This rejoicing reaches a fine verbal sonority that Whitman scarcely ever attained. Timbrels and psaltery are in these lines. But they are not used merely to rouse to fresh victories or warn us from slothful defeats. Sometimes a flute is added and we have music (as in "Sky Lover" and "The Flocks") as poignant as some of the Psalms; it takes almost the best of the Hebraic chants to surpass such a brief snatch as "The Tree" or

THE RUNNER IN THE SKIES

Who is the runner in the skies,
With her blowing scarf of stars,
And our Earth and sun hovering like bees about
her blossoming heart?

Her feet are on the winds, where space is deep, Her eyes are nebulous and veiled. She hurries through the night to a far lover . . .

I cannot end a consideration of this volume without attempting to appraise the concluding ten-page poem which, upon separate reading, is an involved and apparently abortive effort to describe infinity. But "We Unborn" is only baffling when examined apart from its context. Taken as a climax, it becomes an illuminating summing-up, a triumphant résumé. No other poem in the volume is so filled with imagery that is both exquisite and grandiose; none is so colorful and complete a synthesis. This modern psalm, one of the deepest religious outbursts since Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven" and Whitman's "Song of Myself," needs all that has gone before to give it its true significance. Yet even this fragment may suggest some of its power and purpose:

Star-shouldered midnight! Room solid about me! Flesh of my hand holding the pausing pen! How here, cooped in, shall I realize the vision?

Lo, I will bag the stars, clapping the far millions of them in: This scoop is the little womb of the Mother.

I will recede in phantasy a million years back And stand in the sun-fire from which I sprang, And swim the dark river of my life up the ages: That river is the flowing blood of the Mother.

I will take a string and hold one end of it on the Earth
And one end touching the seven high Pleiades,
And I will describe a circle around the Earth:
This huge sphere of skies is but an egg in the body of the
Mother . . .

Mother:

Oh, thou reaching me through thy body with life-blood and love:

So deep within thee I bide: so thoroughly thou growest through me:

That, though the slant of infinity finds me as a mote of a world,

The heavens are but feeders of my growth and the Earth is my supper before the night of death:

The ages of thine agony and mine are the pains of my growing:

They that love me and they that hate me are thy hands shaping me:

And the streets are the running track of my soul.

Mother, may I not well sing the amazing song of life? Oh, may I not well lift the song of my adoration?

This gift is too great for the heart of me so tiny and throbbing:

Bear me on thy tides and pour through me into great and unwithheld creations and love:

Let my lips in the darkness bear witness to thee:

Let my works be thy works through the toil of my hands: Let me go forth in the day dawning, dropping the stars of thy heavens on the darkened streets:

I am thy son, and I would have thee take joy in me:

I am thy unborn, Mother, moving toward the morn of my nativity.

During the following year The Belovéd (B. W. Huebsch, 1915) was published and this novel with its strangely lyric prose drew the usual mixture of extreme condemnation, faint praise and general misunderstanding that almost all new experiments have received. It was accorded every kind of criticism, except a critical one. The fault was not, as most of the detractors stated, that it was "a rhapsodic novel" but that, quite simply, Oppenheim was not a novelist. And yet, of all the

seven volumes of long and short stories that he had published, ranging from the popular early Dr. Rast, with its youthful emotionalism and its pat solutions, to The Olympian with its Dreiserian motif, The Belovéd was by far the best as it was the most original: a daring and almost successful novel in "polyrhythmic" verse.

Oppenheim, however, was not quite daring enough; he lacked the courage to do what Masters did, to print the volume for what it really was: he let it appear as prose. Two of the paragraphs from his book appear rearranged in Songs for the New Age in their true guise and one ("The Man Speaks") is of particular beauty:

You and I in the night, spied on by stars . . . You and I in the beloved night . . . You and I within these walls.

A breath from the sea is kissing the housetops of the city, Kissing the roofs, And dying into silence.

Earth and stars are in a trance,
They dream of passion, but cannot break their sleep.
They pass into us, and we are their passion, we are their madness;

So shaped that we can kiss and clasp . . . One kiss, then death, the miracle being spent.

Watchman, what of the night? Sleep and birth! Toil and death!

Now the light of the topmost tower winks red and ceases:

Now the lonely car echoes afar off . .

Helen looked over the wine-dark seas of Greece, and she was young.

But not younger than we, touching each other, while dawn delays.

But to return, by way of a necessary digression, to the Appollonians. There was something fatuous about the way they employed the word "rhapsodic," as if it were a peculiarly damning epithet. Or as if, having reiterated it, they had achieved an attitude that was critical and a criticism that was crushing. Yet there was a certain justification for their placid bias. Rhapsody was something which was not conspicuous in American literature. Hence it devolved upon them to keep the sluggish stream of native letters free from any turbulent and foreign currents. They did not stop to consider the fact that there was almost an overplus of rhapsody in the profuse energies of American life. These influences seemed irrelevant to the guardians of "style" and sobriety. Had a Russian novelist written The Belovéd the reviewers. in all probability, would have hailed it with glib eloquence concerning the remarkable interweaving of reality and rapture which is, as is well known, so typical of the Russian soul. They would have seen in it a stirring exposition of two opposed forces, beating with resistless determination, through two people. The fact that these two are an ill-matched couple (he, a product of the visionary Puritans; she, a chance gutter-gypsy of the playhouse) would have seemed to them another proof of the "grim, fatalistic quality of Russian life." the very style over which they expostulated so loudly would have been acclaimed as a remarkable departure, the first prolonged use of free verse in the form of a novel. They would have gone on to show how even the more prosy sections are lifted and intensified by this pecularly rhythmic language with its lyric outcries, a speech full of new colors and nuances. . . . All of which, of course, if The Belovéd had been translated from

the Russian. Or the Swedish. Or the late Japanese. Or the neo-Senegambian.

I have gone out of my way a trifle to make clear the reason why Oppenheim's next book of poetry was received with even greater coolness than the preceding. War and Laughter (The Century Company, 1916), an even more rousing volume, is full of vehement protests and a splendor that is no less lovely for being sometimes an angry loveliness. Again there rose the cry of "too much exaltation." And again the objectors failed to realize that they were complaining not because Oppenheim was exalting life but because he was exulting in it. It was once more the contradictory Semitic strain that misled them: the queer blend of delight and disillusion; the quality that hates the world with its shams and double-dealing and still loves it exuberantly,—loves it almost because of its stupidities. This attitude is sharply defined in the revealing "Greed," with its wrangling disputation; it points the irony of "Report on the Planet, Earth"; and it reaches its consummation in "Laughter," which, beginning with a monolog on the solemn fish in the aquarium, grows into a passionate hymn of creation. The poet has learned that laughter spurs and saves the world; it will heal humanity even though man as yet sees only the broadly comic aspect of its trivialities. Oppenheim has the vision of a day when humbug and hypocrisy will not only be detected, but destroyed by a shattering laughter. He sees the time when nothing will be able to stand against its devastating blows; even today, he observes, the earth has dared to be happy beneath the horror and turmoil of a world gone mad. In the water-filled trenches, Death is mocked by a joke; war will end in a shout that will be like a monstrous laugh set free.

Laughter saves us:

Still more than half of us is buried in the quicksands,

Still we suffer.

Still we doubt and are damned . . .

But comes the moment when we take a square look at ourselves.

And seeing how absurd our antics are, laugh and are healed . . .

And so, perhaps, the laughing animal shall save creation . . .

Already the wizened stars must be worried, dumbfounded, To catch that raucous cackle and chortle from the worthless Earth . . .

That mirth in the trenches of the dead,

That noise of relatives eating ham sandwiches after the funeral is over,

That chuckle of the rebuilders of cities following the earthquake,

That wheezing gay cough of the dying consumptive over the doctor's joke . . .

And now, Creation, I think your very purpose was in this: That your great face struggled for ages to break in a smile . . .

We are that smile.

So I say Yes, Yes to the dance of feet in the Spring, Yes to the shouts of children, Yes to laughter!

Laughter, last of the gods, And of them the greatest, Yes, say I, and salute you!

This affirmative gaiety pervades "Golden Death," with its sweeping bacchanal; it winks through "Immoral"; it brings the tragically colored "1914—and After" to a noble close. It adds its tonic brightness to the love-songs that open the volume and lifts its corrective voice in a dozen satiric little pictures of which the sharpest are "A Funeral" and this incisive:

PORTRAIT OF AN INVESTIGATOR OF VICE

His nails were perfect: They were well-trimmed, shining and regular: But under each was a spot of dark dirt. In those nails I saw the man.

or the more sharply humorous:

FERTILIZER

The dead fertilize the living: Any garden will tell you that. Ah, friend, you and I have a neat job for us ahead.

Neither of these excerpts can be classed as poetry, yet they spring from a sharpness of perception that is fed by, if it does not actually feed, the poetic spirit.

I am far less enthusiastic about the group of poems that are obviously written around the theory of psychoanalysis. They are half-failures not only as poetry but as interpretations. These renderings of the Oedipus complex, the "terrible mother," and the mechanism of introversion are too remote to be real. But what is more serious a fault, they seem merely a set of arbitrary symbols arbitrarily set down; scientific jargon repeated rather than translated. They have come too directly from Oppenheim's reading rather than indirectly out of

himself; they seem to have been produced without sufficient gestation. Such poems as "The Centaur," "The Gray Mothers," "Woods," show too determined an effort to "interpret" this new leap of science, too conscious a desire to contribute to its growing literature. "Steps of the Sky" and "The Encircling" are unintelligible to any one except the students of Jung and Freud—and of questionable value to them.

Fortunately, these aberrations are rare. In the next volume, The Book of Self (A. A. Knopf, 1917), Oppenheim is still over-concerned with valuations of analytic psychology, but the preoccupation is less obtrusive. The only portion that is imperfectly fused is the second section ("The Song of Life"), where the translations are pseudo-scientific, the struggle too smoothly managed. It is a cross between a warmed-over myth and a morality play lost in a theory. The first section, however, is a generous recompense. Here is a series of self-criticisms for all selves; brief, acerbic, caustic. Never perfunctory, always probing, these lines frequently reach depths we may have suspected but seldom cared to explore; they direct a sudden shaft of light into chasms and dark corners that we thought were hidden. There is a clairvovance about this group; an intuition that is seen at its best in such revealing flashes as:

I ask your honest opinion:
But beware of giving it to me . . .
Self is swift to turn against the assailant.

Truly I will listen calmly, laugh casually, Tell you you are right . . . But deeper I am merely like a raw wound, Hurt by a breath.

60 The New Era in American Poetry and this subtle illumination:

I preached passionately
That the meek shall inherit the earth,
And that of the poor is the kingdom of heaven,
And that the last shall be first,
And that woe shall come to him who harms
the least of these.

For I was of the lowly, And I was poor, And I was the last, And I was of the least of these.

or such harder criticisms as:

The golden mean—Yes, I have practised the golden mean.

There are many mysteries, miracles too, I haven't tested, I haven't experienced Height and abyss are missed But I went safe.

It was all here for my taking,
And I knew at the start that the great miss
little,
But are children of hell and stars,
Made wise through extreme life . . .
But I, I practised the golden mean
And went unscathed . . . and childish.

But it is the concluding section that is the climax and even the cause of the volume. This symbolic poem, half-dream, half-drama, is an attempt to summarize the history of man—and it almost approximates the impossible. In "Creation," whose motto is "He who finds himself, finds humanity," Oppenheim goes back to the

beginnings of time to discover the undiscoverable secret. This is its opening:

(As curtains part, darkness, silence . . . a mist, with now and then a dim watery light upon it. Far echoing voices, thin, almost immaterial.)

FIRST VOICE

Sleep . . . still sleep . . .

SECOND VOICE

I stir . . .

Voices

(Floating, like soft winds, with undulation through all space.)

Longing . . . longing . . .

FOURTH VOICE

What cries in chaos?

VOICES

The voice, the lifting voice of a wave that begins, To circle and slowly gather,
And circling, roll . . .

A GATHERING OF VOICES

Longing . . . life is longing . . . Life is the lifting up of hands to the never-attained, Life is the many-thundered charging up receding heights . . . We rise, we sink. . . .

All though the prolog Oppenheim has attained new colors and a strange brilliance that impress one even more than their philosophic content. Such a burst of music is the choral passage that begins:

Something seeks forth from me,

Something arises in dark struggle to life above me . . .

The great waves roll to the shore . . .

They hang breathless;

They hang at death's edge . . .

(A silence . . .

Then bursting forth in triumphant chant.)

Creation thunders gloriously and the lips of life are opened . . .

The glory of the heavens shall be made manifest. . .

The feet of the deep shall laugh up the hills of night . . .

The heavens at the right hand shall rise and shake their hair at the under heavens.

The heavens at the left hand shall sing to that shaking forth of challenge . . .

Skies shall declare themselves in flame;

Darkness shall be advertised in fire . . .

Elsewhere the notes are softened to a deeper, Biblical fervor. There is an even greater music and quieter warmth in the meditation:

Who buried Atlantis

And devoured Egypt?

Into what jaws has Athens gone?

Galley-slave and Agamemnon, the great king, are shovelled under,

And the girl that combed the hair of Helen is dust with her golden mistress . . .

Cities of great pride, with their multitudes,

Have gone down,

And Spring, that called out the boy Dante into the streets of Florence,

Silent when Beatrice walked,

Opens wild roses in the ruins over the dead . . .

The snows where Saga heroes fought

Melted with those warriors,

And the desert girls of Arabia are only a song and an echo in our brains. . .

James Oppenheim

The same great war; the same great urge: the same birth and death . . .

Are kisses sweeter than in Carthage? Is failure more bitter than on the hill of Gethsemane? Has death lost its sting since Rachel?

Whither goes the pageantry and the vision-clouded army? Dust—flame: dust—flame . . . Out of a cry, silence . . . Out of silence, a cry . . .

These lines reveal Oppenheim's fullest power—and his greatest defect. In his effort to show the vast continuity of existence, to reveal life as a progression of old pageants, a revivifying of the past, he is apt to fall into the habit of cataloguing, of depending too much on glamorous names. The name of Helen of Greece, for instance, is not merely a symbol to him; it is an obsession. Thus he frequently flies back to the very maternal past from which he is so anxious to escape. "Away from the Mother!" he cries, clinging to her skirts for a last poetic embrace. And away he runs, only to return with startling regularity to repeat the same rebellious slogan.

It is because of these occasional inconsistencies that he sometimes lapses into elaboration rather than eloquence. It is in such careless and loquacious moments that his divagations are likely to lead him away from poetry toward the laboratory. The conscious elucidator of science sometimes takes the pen away from the unconscious interpreter of life, and what should have been fluid and imaginative becomes fixed and dogmatic. But these moments are rare and the music is usually on a level with the message. It is this that gives Oppenheim's arresting optimism ("We are

flesh on the way to godhood") so native a quality. His forthcoming *The Solitary* (Huebsch, 1919) displays a new control without sacrificing the earlier exuberance. Passion, restrained but resurgent, sings through the pages.

These cries of ecstatic discontent and daring fill his volumes. Their force is not so much that which goes into books of poetry as into challenges; battle-cries that rouse us against the armies of the torpidly living and the complacently dead.

VACHEL LINDSAY

STRIKING as are the differences between Frost and Oppenheim, the diversity of our new American poets is even more emphasized by the contrasting work of Vachel Lindsay. His background, like Frost's, is definitely local; his impulse, like Oppenheim's, indefinitely religious. But his blend of these forces is peculiarly individualized and peculiarly national. A pagan by intention and a puritan by intuition. He is, as I think he desires to be, the minstrel turned missionary; a cornfed Apollo singing to convert the heathen. for reformation exhibits itself in many ways. It includes a rhymed explanation as to why Lindsay voted the socialist ticket, exhortative verses pleading for Prohibition, a Salvation Army tribute (with all the drums and tambourines) to General Booth Entering Heaven, and a jeremiad (running to the other extreme) addressed bluntly "to the United States Senate." But his first and most enduring concern is doubtless embodied in the doctrine which he has called "The New Localism," which is explained in his prose volume Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty, a thesis that will be found amplified and applied in his forthcoming The Golden Book of Springfield. I doubt if there is any man in America who has labored longer and more earnestly than Lindsay to encourage the half-hearted beauty that hides and fears to declare itself in our dull and complacent villages and townships. His gay, intrepid spirit,

his racy little prose pamphlets, his tramping journeys on which the sixteen-page Rhymes to be Traded for Bread (printed and distributed by himself) were given for a meal or a night's lodging—these, in themselves, compose a gospel of beauty more persuasive and potent than a hundred sermons.

This dream of reanimating and beautifying the thousands of dreamless villages, of instigating an artistic renaissance in the smallest of provincial communities, was not merely a forlorn and isolated fantasy. At the moment that Lindsay was proclaiming a new day for the talented children of the soil, an era when democracy. art and prayer shall not be at war with each other, others were being moved by similar visions. And in an uncharted pin-point whose post office address is College Station, Texas, another dreamer was expounding his creed through a little monthly bravely entitled The Texas Nativist. Here, at five cents the copy, Samuel Asbury lashed local unconcern; fought for the formation of town and city schools to encourage the native arts in Texas and America: advocated "naïve collaboration" by amateurs: combated, with a holy fervor, the radical realism which was triumphant and the bankrupt romanticism which was dying of its own anaemia; hailed both socialists and capitalists as common enemies and challenged them continually in the name of "the immemorial institutional order of things, the product, not of economic causes, but of man's will, triumphant over nature and economic causes"; waged a vigorous warfare for "dynamic art" against "static culture"—in short, kept his audience in a fine ferment, bubbling with excitement and a consequent desire to create or, at least, to maintain an interest in things creative. As an illustrative text, I quote the

opening paragraph of an article from the February, 1915, number of Mr. Asbury's intransigeant little paper:

"Whichever way a nativist turns in Texas or America, he sees the killing blight of static culture. Its deadening power pervades our homes and our churches, our schools and societies, even our politics and industries. course we use the expression 'static culture' relatively. Nothing is absolutely static; even the inner particles of the hardest rock have motion. But though nothing is devoid of motion, static force, as opposed to dynamic energy, may be defined as that kind of force which moves in the smallest minimum orbit. Even so static culture. Thus, card-playing is static culture. It moves in a minimum of mental energy. All that is dynamic or creative, namely, the rules of the game, has been settled for ages. The gentle titillation of the mental powers of the card craftsman through following the rules of the game is culture,—not art,—merely static culture. Following the changes of fashion in clothes is static culture. Organized sport, be it college athletics or league baseball, is nothing else but static culture. For in all these passivities there is no plan of progress, no constructive design, only a journalistic, that is, a diurnalistic, or seasonal shifting of easy combinations to meet the ever lazy desires of human beings for sport or for little events that will help pass the time away. To kill time!—the most precious thing in human life!"

To return to Lindsay, we find the same kindling enthusiasm in all his work, the same desire to help create a new poetic environment. It expresses itself in mediums as varied as an "interpretation" of a future

imaginative community (vide the poem "The Soul of the City Receives the Gift of the Holy Spirit"), or in a roundabout effort to apply the democratic aesthetic system to a particular and popular art (as in his volume The Art of the Moving Picture). But Lindsay has also expressed some of these doctrines directly. When he started on his walking-trips in the South in 1906 and, later on, from Illinois through Kansas and into New Mexico, he took with him no money and practically no baggage. He carried mainly printed matter. He had with him reproductions of a series of his drawings, "The Village Improvement Parade," remarkably rhythmic and skilfully composed picture-cartoons, which he pinned on in and outdoor walls, explaining the mottoes on the banners and exhorting the farmers to study them at their leisure. These drawings are as characteristic as anything Lindsay has ever done—and as individual. Lindsay cheerfully acknowledges his debt to Robert Henri, his last and practically his only master, but the drawings themselves owe no more to this brilliant teacher than they do to the line of Beardsley or to the Egyptian hieroglyphs. All three of these influences may be discerned in Lindsay's pictures, but there is a wildness of conception, a whimsy of design, a buoyant sweep that is nothing else but Lindsay. "The Village Improvement Parade" (a parade held for the purpose of "making over the village from the standpoint of beauty") is composed of a series of strangely patterned trees and a grouping of youths carrying fantastic banners that display the symbolic acorn with a series of legends, some of which are:

Fair Streets are Better than Silver, Green Parks are Better than Gold. Bad Taste is Mob-Law; Good Public Taste is Democracy.

Ugliness is a kind of Misgovernment.

A Bad Designer is, to That Extent, A Bad Citizen.

Without an Eager Public, All Teaching is Vain.

To Begin, we must have a Sense of Humor and learn to Smile.

I particularly remember another series of drawings which seem to me even more exquisite and vivid. It is the set used to illustrate "The Soul of the City Receives the Gift of the Holy Spirit," drawings which are so much more illuminating than the poem that I suspect the text was written only to explain the pictures. This rhymed tract is not one-tenth as effective as the ten wordless plates that, taking their motif from the first line of the poem, show a set of oddly-designed censers swinging over the town of Springfield. And in the lower corner, as hieroglyphics of the body and soul of the city, are placed such public buildings as Abraham Lincoln's residence, the State House, the Lincoln monument, etc. I hope that all of these prints, together with many of Lindsay's lighter sketches, will some day achieve the dignity of a bound volume; they will round out the study of this combined poet, panhandler and pamphleteer.

In the pack that held the "Rhymes to be Traded for Bread," Lindsay also carried a brief "Gospel of Beauty" which he distributed freely and which contained his own definition of his aims. Here is what Lindsay means by "The New Localism":

"The things most worth while are one's own hearth and neighborhood. We should make our own home and neighborhood the most democratic, the most beautiful and the holiest in the world. The children now growing up should become devout gardeners or architects or park architects or teachers of dancing in the Greek spirit or musicians or novelists or poets or story-writers or craftsmen or woodcarvers or dramatists or actors or singers. They should find their talent and nurse it industriously. They should believe in every possible application to arttheory of the thoughts of the Declaration of Independence and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. They should, if led by the spirit, wander over the whole nation in search of the secret of democratic beauty with their hearts at the same time filled to overflowing with the righteousness of God. Then they should come back to their own hearth and neighborhood and gather a little circle of their own sort of workers about them and strive to make the neighborhood and home more beautiful and democratic and holy with their special art. . . . They should labor in their little circle expecting neither reward nor honors. . . . In their darkest hours they should be made strong by the vision of a completely beautiful neighborhood and the passion for a completely democratic art."

There is something curious, almost contradictory about a man leaving his home town to tell men they should return to their birthplaces. But this is precisely what Lindsay preached and did. One should know the earth but one should not be a gypsy forever. The vagabond, he insisted, should taste the scattered largesse of the world. But he should return home. And having

returned, he should plant the seeds he had gathered abroad. Toward the end of the volume Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty (The Macmillan Co.) I find this illuminating paragraph, one of a set of proclamations that bring the chapters to a major cadence.

"Walking across this land I have found them,—little ganglions of life, promise of thousands more. The next generation will be that of the eminent village. The son of the farmer will be no longer dazzled and destroyed by the fires of the metropolis. He will travel, but only for what he can bring back. Just as his father sends half-way across the continent for good corn or melonseed, so he will make his village famous by transplanting and growing this idea or that. He will make it known for its pottery or its processions, its philosophy or its peacocks, its music or its swans, its golden roofs or its great union cathedral of all faiths. There are a thousand miscellaneous achievements within the scope of the great-hearted village. Our agricultural land today holds the ploughboys who will bring these benefits. I have talked to these boys. I know them. I have seen their gleaming eyes."

Those who are interested in the growth and unfolding of this purpose should read A Handy Guide for Beggars (The Macmillan Co.), which is in itself an introduction to Lindsay's work in behalf of American aesthetics.

The Golden Book of Springfield will correlate and synthesize these scattered speculations. Its aim is to bring a sense of vision not only to the art policies of a town but to its politics. Its hope is to change a few

stolid citizens into converts, to transform these few as thoroughly as if they had been converted by Mohammedanism or Christian Science, or by any strong internal revolution. In a sort of unpublished private prolog Lindsay has said: "Civics is not yet a religion. I hope to see (and help make) it as much a religion as healing is a religion in Christian Science, or undertaking was a religion in Egypt. Personally, I do not want to do it on an ethical or argumentative basis. That is not my province. I believe that men may be transformed by their imaginations. It is not, of course, the only basis; but it is one basis and the one to which I happen to have access. I think this city (as any other) could be transformed, not by being a bit better or more pious, but simply by dreaming—dreaming as fervently as one hundred poets you and I know. If a high desire and fine imagination once be accepted as the first requisite in citizenship—be even considered as the main fact of citizenship—the rest will follow. It is my hope that, beginning in a tiny way in tiny communities, this intensive co-operation shall persist until the poets will become militant citizens and the commonwealths shall strengthen the people as artists, craftsmen and poets." These preliminary quotations bring us closer not only to Lindsay the propagandist but to Lindsay the poet.

With an appreciation of these matters, one approaches his first important volume of poetry, General William Booth Enters into Heaven and Other Poems (1913, Mitchell Kennerley), with sympathetic understanding. Here one immediately encounters the curious blend of athletic exuberance, community pride and evangelism. Consider the first poem, which gives the book its title. Here is the apotheosis of a great social-religious move-

ment; but it is not so much a tribute to the Salvation Army as it is a glorification of a spirit greater and far beyond it. From a technical standpoint, Lindsay's attempt to blend noise, novelty and an old ecstasy is highly successful—and almost fortuitous. The experiment of setting lofty lines and reverential sentiment to cheap and brassy music is daring and splendid; especially since, in its very tawdriness, the music of the verse gives back the flavor of those earnest and blatant gatherings. It is, in a more definitely revivalistic spirit, the first of those characteristic chants (with the germs of the "higher vaudeville") which Lindsay lifted to so individual a plane. Here is the first section:

(Bass drum beaten loudly.)

Booth led boldly with his big bass drum—
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
The Saints smiled gravely and they said: "He's come."
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
Walking lepers followed, rank on rank,
Lurching bravoes from the ditches dank,
Drabs from the alleyways and drug-fiends pale—
Minds still passion-ridden, soul-powers frail.
Vermin-eaten saints with mouldy breath,
Unwashed legions with the ways of Death—
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

(Banjos.)

Every slum had sent its half-a-score
The round world over. (Booth had groaned for more.)

Every banner that the wide world flies Bloomed with glory and transcendent dyes. Big-voiced lasses made their banjos bang, Tranced, fanatical they shrieked and sang:— "Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?"

Hallelujah! It was queer to see Bull-necked convicts with that land make free! Loons with trumpets blowed a blare, blare, blare On, on upward through the golden air! (Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb!)

And here is the rattling climax:

(Grand chorus of all instruments. Tambourines to the foreground.)

The hosts were sandalled, and the wings were fire! (Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?) But their noise played havoc with the angel-choir. (Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?) O, shout Salvation! It was good to see Kings and princes by the Lamb set free. The banjos rattled, and the tambourines Jing-jing-jingled in the hands of Queens!

(Reverently sung; no instruments.)

And when Booth halted by the curb for prayer He saw his Master through the flag-filled air. Christ came gently with a robe and crown For Booth the soldier, while the throng knelt down. He saw King Jesus. They were face to face, And he knelt a-weeping in that holy place. Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

No more colorful and solemn noise has yet been heard in our living song.

The banjos rattled, and the tambourines Jing-jing-jingled in the hands of Queens!

Such a scrap is as orchestral as a dozen pages of elaborate instrumentation. It is, in its brazen directness, another phase not only of the new spirit that has enlivened American poetry but of America itself.

It would be too much to expect the rest of the volume to live up to this amazing piece of work, and it does not. Lindsay the man is always a poet, but Lindsay the poet does not always write poetry. When he errs it is not, as one critic has pointed out, "on the side of the time-spirit"; when he fails it is not because he tries to express his age but because he expresses it badly. Frequently his verse rises from nothing more carefully constructed than a conviction, an anger, a crusade against the white-slave traffic or the corner saloon. Here his voice gets beyond his control: in his haste to deliver his message, he has no time to choose sharp and living words: he takes what comes first to hand—good, bad, indifferent—and hurries on, blurring the firm outline, losing the sense of leashed power without which no art-work can be ennobled. His aim is commendable but his volleys are erratic. In his anxiety to bang the bell, he sometimes shoots not only the target but the background to pieces. Such an effect is "The Trap," with its glib didacticism and its stock-worn phrases. Such a poem also is the polemic "To the United States Senate" and one or two more. But these things are the poet in his dullest periods even though they be the propagandist in his most fiery moments. The excellent blend of both of them is achieved otherwhere, notably in the dignified and sonorous:

THE EAGLE THAT IS FORGOTTEN

(John P. Altgeld. Born, December 30, 1847; died, March 12, 1902.)

Sleep softly . . . eagle forgotten . . . under the stone. Time has its way with you there, and the clay has its own.

"We have buried him now," thought your foes, and in secret rejoiced.

They made a brave show of their mourning, their hatred unvoiced.

They had snarled at you, barked at you, foamed at you day after day,

Now you were ended. They praised you . . . and laid you away.

The others that mourned you in silence and terror and truth,
The widow bereft of her crust, and the boy without youth,
The mocked and the scorned and the wounded, the lame and
the poor

That should have remembered forever . . . remember no more.

Where are those lovers of yours, on what name do they call—

The lost, that in armies wept over your funeral pall? They call on the names of a hundred high-valiant ones; A hundred white eagles have risen, the sons of your sons. The zeal in their wings is a zeal that your dreaming began, The valor that wore out your soul in the service of man.

Sleep softly, . . . eagle forgotten, . . . under the stone. Time has its way with you there and the clay has its own. Sleep on, O brave-hearted, O wise man, that kindled the flame—

To live in mankind is far more than to live in a name,
To live in mankind, far, far more . . . than to live in a
name.

This fused quality is to be seen, in a lighter vein, in "Upon Returning to the Country Road," in "Where is David, the Next King of Israel?" and "A Net to Snare the Moonlight." In these we note the growth of fantasy and whimsical extravagance which, in the ensuing volumes, come to play so great a part in Lindsay's work.

Touched with an elfin charm that is both good-humored and grotesque, they reach their highest pitch in "The Light o' the Moon," a series in which different people and animals look upon the moon and each creature finds in it his own mood and disposition. Here are two units:

THE OLD HORSE IN THE CITY

The moon's a peck of corn. It lies Heaped up for me to eat. I wish that I might climb the path And taste that supper sweet.

Men feed me straw and scanty grain And beat me till I'm sore. Some day I'll break the halter-rope And smash the stable-door,—

Run down the street and mount the hill Just as the corn appears. I've seen it rise at certain times For years and years and years.

WHAT THE HYENA SAID

The moon is but a golden skull, She mounts the heavens now, And Moon-Worms, mighty Moon-Worms Are wreathed around her brow.

The Moon-Worms are a doughty race: They eat her gray and golden face. Her eye-sockets dead, and molding head: These caverns are their dwelling-place.

The Moon-Worms, serpents of the skies, From the great hollows of her eyes Behold all souls, and they are wise:

With tiny, keen and icy eyes, Behold how each man sins and dies.

When Earth in gold-corruption lies Long dead, the moon-worm butterflies On cyclone wings will reach this place— Yea, rear their brood on earth's dead face.

This series is continued and amplified in the succeeding volume. And so, without further introduction, I turn to *The Congo and Other Poems* (The Macmillan Co., 1914) and quote four more of these lively fancies from the section called "The Moon is a Mirror."

THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA

"If I could set the moon upon This table," said my friend, "Among the standard poets And brochures without end, And noble prints of old Japan, How empty they would seem, By that encyclopaedia Of whim and glittering dream."

WHAT THE MOON SAW

Two statesmen met by moonlight.
Their ease was partly feigned.
They glanced about the prairie.
Their faces were constrained.
In various ways aforetime
They had misled the state,
Yet did it so politely
Their henchmen thought them great.
They sat beneath a hedge and spake
No word, but had a smoke.
A satchel passed from hand to hand . . .
Next day, the deadlock broke.

WHAT THE LITTLE GIRL SAID

The Moon's the North Wind's cooky. He bites it, day by day,
Until there's but a rim of scraps
That crumble all away.

The South Wind is a baker.

He kneads clouds in his den,

And bakes a crisp new moon THAT . . . GREEDY

NORTH . . . WIND . . . EATS . . . AGAIN!

WHAT GRANDPA TOLD THE CHILDREN

The moon? It is a griffin's egg, Hatching tomorrow night.

And how the little boys will watch With shouting and delight
To see him break the shell and stretch And creep across the sky.

The boys will laugh. The little girls, I fear, may hide and cry.

Yet gentle will the griffin be, Most decorous and fat, And walk up to the milky way . . . And lap it like a cat.

This volume gives us Lindsay's mixture of rhymes, rag-time and religion in his best blend. Here the rubber-stamp idioms, the trade jargons of poetry, are lost in a sudden sweep of infectious and impulsive rhythms. These chants which form the larger part of the volume may not be the most powerful poetry that Lindsay has written, but they are undoubtedly the most popular; they give people that primitive joy in syncopated sound that thrills them far more than critical didacticism or an ingenious theory of aesthetics. These verses demand

to be read aloud; they are fresh evidence of the fact that poetry is fundamentally an oral art, an art appealing to the ear rather than to the eye. And it is as an experiment in widening the borders of this song-art that they must be regarded. In pleading for a consideration of the possibilities of its development, Lindsay calls attention (via Professor Edward Bliss Reed's volume The English Lyric) to the Greek lyrists who, accompanying themselves, composed their own accompaniments. "Here," he says, "is pictured a type of Greek work which survives in American vaudeville, where every line may be two-thirds spoken and one-third sung; the entire rendering, musical and elocutionary, depending upon the improvising power and sure instinct of the performer. . . . I respectfully submit these poems," continued Lindsay, "as experiments in which I endeavor to carry this vaudeville form back towards the old Greek precedent of the half-chanted lyric. In this case the one-third of music must be added by the instinct of the reader. He must be Iophon. And he can easily be Iophon if he brings to bear upon the piece what might be called the Higher Vaudeville imagination."

It must be admitted that, to bring out their full surge and swing, it is not only necessary to hear these poems chanted, but to hear them chanted by Lindsay himself. Once having heard his highly original declamations, it is impossible for any one to forget the tunes and tempi. Without this variation of manner and melody—the rich unction of certain phrases contrasting sharply with the metallic staccato of others, the abrupt changes from a slow, deliberate andante to the briskest and most burly of allegros—much of the verse is merely rumbling

and repetitive. Lindsay does his best to help his readers by means of a running fire of stage-directions along the edge of each page. But it is difficult, for any but a trained musician, to achieve half the effects he calls for. In the speed and clatter of the verses, Lindsay's admonishing voice, coaching, as it were, from the side-lines, is often lost.

For all this, the title-poem is a complete success, even on the printed page. The same flaming sincerity that kindled "General Booth Enters into Heaven" turns what is noisy or extravagant in these lines to eloquence. The cold type warms with a savage, insistent beat: the roll and sweep, even without Lindsay's sonorous baritone, quicken passages prosy and almost perfunctory by themselves. It is impossible to give any idea of this poem by mangled quotations; it is equally impossible to describe it. Nevertheless, Lindsay himself has made a heroic attempt to do so. In a letter outlining this composition he wrote: "'The Congo' is in twelve more or less equal parts: (1) The death of a missionary on the Congo. (2) A cannibal war dance. (3) The Springfield, Illinois, race-riots. (4) The burnings-alive of negroes in the South. (5) The camp-meetings of half-wild negroes. (6) Williams and Walker's Original Comedy Company. (7) An old-time minstrel show. (8) Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. (9) Uncle Tom's Cabin. (10) The Emancipation Proclamation. (11) The songs of Stephen C. Foster, and (12) The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. du Bois." Impossible though it is to give the power of these verses except in bulk, the first section reveals the surprising method as well as the aboriginal music:

Fat black bucks in a wine-barrel room, Barrel-house kings, with feet unstable, Sagged and reeled and pounded on the table, Pounded on the table. Beat an empty barrel with the handle of a broom, Hard as they were able, Boom, boom, BOOM,-With a silk umbrella and the handle of a broom, Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM. THEN I had religion, THEN I had a vision. I could not turn from their revel in derision. THEN I SAW THE CONGO. CREEPING THROUGH THE BLACK. Cutting through the Jungle with a golden track. Then along that riverbank

More delib-

deep rolling

A thousand miles

Tattooed cannibals danced in files;

Then I heard the boom of the blood-lust song And a thigh-bone beating on a tin-pan gong.

And "BLOOD" screamed the whistles and the fifes of the warriors:

"BLOOD" screamed the skull-faced, lean witchdoctors.

"Whirl ye the deadly voo-doo rattle,

Harry the uplands, Steal all the cattle,

Rattle-rattle, rattle-rattle,

Bing!

Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM,"

A roaring, epic, rag-time tune

From the mouth of the Congo To the Mountains of the Moon.

Death is an Elephant.

Torch-eyed and horrible.

Foam-flanked and terrible.

Boom, steal the pygmies.

Boom, kill the Arabs,

Boom, kill the white men,

Hoo, Hoo, Hoo . . .

Vachel Lindsay

Listen to the yell of Leopold's ghost
Burning in Hell for his hand-maimed host.
Hear how the demons chuckle and yell
Cutting his hands off, down in Hell.
Listen to the creepy proclamation,
Blown through the lairs of the forest-nation;
Blown past the white-ants' hill of clay,
Blown past the marsh where the butterflies play:—
"Be careful what you do,
Or Mumbo-Jumbo, God of the Congo,
And all of the other
Gods of the Congo,
Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you,
Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you,

Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo vou."

Like the wind in the chimney.

All the " o "
sounds very
golden.
Heavy accents
very heavy.
Light accents
very light.
Last line
whishered.

"The Sante Fé Trial," which follows this poem, is the most daring experiment in the volume, and there are about a dozen excellent aesthetic reasons why it should be a complete failure. Strangely enough, it is a complete success. This delicate and light-hearted humoresque is sung to an orchestral accompaniment of race-horns, klaxons, trumpets, thundering motors, the mad tympani of open mufflers, and a list of cities blared through the megaphone or shouted "like a train caller in a Union depot." And all this uproar whirls around fairy interludes and scraps of fancy which somehow are not drowned in the shrieking maelstrom. So strikingly does each contrast set off the other, that the effect of the whole is startling in loveliness no less than speed.

It is in the third poem ("The Firemen's Ball") that Lindsay unconsciously reveals how this very power, when pushed beyond its limits, fails; how, as in this instance, it often falls into dogma and doggerel. The musical content shows this poet at his worst (although it

is still a far cry from the futurism of Marinetti and the typographical tricks of his followers like Apollinaire and others); it is seven parts unlovely noise and three parts uninspired nonsense. This very increase of clangor defeats itself. Poe, many years ago, accomplished the magic of mere sound; but he did it by bringing to such poor rhymes as "Ulalume" and "The Bells," a subtle music that rang new changes under the insistent reiteration.

To return to "The Firemen's Ball," its philosophy is even more questionable than the melody. It is its own amazing contradiction. From a roaring picture of a burning building, which is meant to symbolize the holocaust of life, Lindsay turns to the horrible (to him) glimpse of the firemen making love to their sweethearts (the baleful fires of passion mingling with the "lustful, insinuating music") and, as a grand finale, he gives us a rumbling, vague and negative Buddhistic sermon, quoting approvingly from a section of the Mahavagga that ends, "By absence of passion he is made free." The contradiction is in Lindsay's very treatment; he cannot get his spirit to believe in his theme. Even while he writes:

"Life is a flame:—
Be cold as the dew
Would you win at the game,"

his lines refuse to obey him and go leaping along. Lindsay in this, as well as in some of the other poems, is like a man dancing gaily on the top of a windy mountain, his eyes blazing, his whole body kindled with the energy of living—and shouting all the while, "We must abolish passion! Down with Life!"

It is hard to understand this unwillingness on Lindsay's part to understand passion. It is harder to understand why he misrepresents and misinterprets it. And it is all the more strange since this passionate élan is his most valuable possession. The passion for making drab villages beautiful (vide "The Soul of the City," "I Heard Immanuel Singing" and his early broadsides); the passion for peace, as evinced in the somewhat rhetorical but none the less earnest war poems at the end of The Congo; the passion for righting hideous wrongs -these are some of the passions that burn through Lindsay's work and illuminate his lines with their quickening flame. There are many times, indeed, when he reminds one of the revivalist turned socialist; he has the strangely mingled passions of both. As a random example, take these eight splendid lines:

THE LEADEN-EYED

Let not young souls be smothered out before They do quaint deeds and fully flaunt their pride. It is the world's one crime its babes grow dull, Its poor are ox-like, limp and leaden-eyed.

Not that they starve, but starve so dreamlessly, Not that they sow, but that they seldom reap, Not that they serve, but have no gods to serve, Not that they die, but that they die like sheep.

Or witness this fine satire with its biting whiplash in the penultimate line:

Factory windows are always broken. Somebody's always throwing bricks; Somebody's always heaving cinders, Playing ugly Yahoo tricks.

Factory windows are always broken. Other windows are let alone. No one throws through the chapel-window The bitter, snarling, derisive stone.

Factory windows are always broken.

Something or other is going wrong.

Something is rotten—I think, in Denmark. . . .

END OF THE FACTORY-WINDOW SONG.

I pass hurriedly over the unaccountable stupidities which have been injected into the volume: The mawkish tributes to the doll-like Mary Pickford, the flashing Blanche Sweet et al., the 'comic'-supplement humor of "When Gassy Thompson Struck It Rich"—and proceed to Lindsay's most recent volume. Here (The Chinese Nightingale, The Macmillan Co., 1917) we have a similar mixture of high-flying fantasy and dogged fact, of primitive emotionalism and evangelistic propaganda. The two volumes give the weird effect of Buddha dancing to a jazz band; of the doxology performed on a steam calliope; of the Twentieth Century Express running lightly over a child's flower garden; of The Reverend William Sunday and Bert Williams reciting the Beatitudes. The latter effect is particularly evoked by "The Booker Washington Trilogy," most strikingly in the poem "Simon Legree." It would be interesting to see what genuine negro composers like Will Marion Cook, Rosamund Johnson or H. T. Burleigh could do with this poem. Or with the "The Congo," using it as a symphony for full orchestra, reinforced by banios. bones, marimbas, xylophones and a dark baritone solo. Or "King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba" as the libretto for an opulent, afro-oriental cantata. Here again one wishes for Lindsay's vocal delivery in order to

receive the full flavor of these lines. But the person who can read them without feeling a good part of their racy imagery, vigor and humor, is dead not alone to poetry but to persuasion. No one can fail to enjoy the spectacle of the white poet speaking through the confused oratory of the old negro preacher, working up his audience and himself, and making desirable the very thing he set out to make horrible—Simon Legree being described, with loving envy, in a hell that sounds suspiciously like a poor slave's paradise. Here is the inviting climax:

And the Devil said to Simon Legree:

"I like your style, so wicked and free.
Come sit and share my throne with me,
And let us bark and revel."
And there they sit and gnash their teeth,
And each one wears a hop-vine wreath.
They are matching pennies and shooting
craps,
They are playing poker and taking naps.
And old Legree is fat and fine:
He eats the fire, he drinks the wine—
Blood and burning turpentine—
Down, down with the Devil;
Down, down with the Devil;

It is these highly original chants that have made many critics exaggerate Lindsay's standing as a bizarre innovator and minimize his importance as a serious creator. Most of his deprecators insist on discussing only the twenty per cent of his art that they think is the novelty. But even here, they are mistaken. They have taken a journalistic, almost a jejune attitude toward his work; and they fail to realize that when they assume he is

88

lost in technical mazes (he has even been grouped, by two cataloguing critics, with the Imagists) he is distracted little by method and not at all by form. Technical discussions rage, he surmises, because most poets are twenty-five, which is the technical age. It is therefore somewhat distressing to an artist who has reached the maturity of thirty-nine years, to have his detractors protest at violations that he never committed. critics assume that "The Congo," for instance, is a new form. It is not. It is, as Lindsay has retorted, one of the oldest, most orthodox, most over-conventionalized forms in the English language:-the Ode. It is a form which, says Lindsay, has been worn out and practically dropped because it degenerated into false and pompous apostrophes. One can doubtless find precedents for every line of "The Congo" in a long array of odes in English, which have not failed to be in print simply because they were originally intended to be sung. Many times the most successful odes are not specifically so labeled and this adds to the critics' confusion. It seems probable that Lanier thought he was inventing a new form when he wrote "The Marshes of Glynn" and that Coleridge was laboring under a similar delusion when he began "Kubla Khan" and "Christabel." Lindsay is not so self-deceived and it seems an ironic injustice that he should be accused of doing or. what is still more ludicrous, failing to do the very thing he has carefully avoided even trying to do.

The defects in this volume are of an entirely different caliber. He has, in a commendable effort to extend the borders of the ode, gone a few steps farther and (taking his cue, I suspect, from Dryden's "Alexander's Feast") has expanded the chant into what he calls "Poem-

Games," which add an undercurrent of alien music and the services of a dancer to the elocutionist's art. "In the 'Poem-Games.'" the author writes in an introductory note. "the English word is still first in importance, the dancer comes second, the chanter third." But in order to keep the chanter from getting too far ahead of the dancer, the poet has been compelled to repeat insignificant and fugitive phrases, until the English word loses not only its importance but its import. For instance, observe how the rich and simple music of "King Solomon" has been attenuated and dragged out into tiresome commonplaces by the dull and devasting repetitions. Or see how so slight a piece of fooling as "The Potatoes' Dance" has been lengthened far beyond the poem's limits and the reader's interest. The opening lines will explain:

> "Down cellar," said the cricket, "Down cellar," said the cricket, "Down cellar," said the cricket "I saw a ball last night, In honor of a lady, In honor of a lady, In honor of a lady, Whose wings were pearly-white. The breath of bitter weather, The breath of bitter weather, The breath of bitter weather. Had smashed the cellar pane. We entertained a drift of leaves. We entertained a drift of leaves. We entertained a drift of leaves . . . Et cetera.

Compare this doggerel to the amazing "John Brown," which, lacking these verbal impediments, begins with a

90

childlike catalog and runs through negro pomposity to a picturesque and powerful close.

But Lindsay is not only the lyric interpreter of the dark race. He can play on other instruments as well as the bones and calliope. In fact, some of his strummings on the lute are even more potent though less dynamic than his improvisations for brass band. Turn to the title poem and see how lightly the music evokes new hints of the ancient East. Forgetting programs or pronunciamentoes, Lindsay has let his whimsical mind loose among singing idols, "golden junks in a laughing river," rainbow fishes, explanatory nightingales, river-pirates, windbells, affable dragons, peacock landscapes and ghostly suggestions of a culture that was old when the Ming dynasty was young.

Elsewhere the mixture is less enticing. The evangelist seems to be in the ascendancy and the verse suffers in consequence. The war has undoubtedly brought out in Lindsay the usual religious reaction, but it is a somewhat ministerial fervor. Compared to the cosmic religion celebrated by James Oppenheim, it has a prim and parochial tang; it sounds frequently less like a surge of song than a Sunday sermon. The Chatauqua platform performer is a rôle to which Lindsay seems to be growing increasingly partial. This shifting of artistic bases recalls how difficult a position Lindsay maintained in his other volumes; how dexterously he balanced himself in a devotion to a liberal socialism on one hand and a strict prohibition on the other. So in this collection. Pulled one way as a poet by the imperious demands of Beauty and another way, as propagandist, by the moral dictates of the Uplift crusade; he shows a vacillation, almost pathetic, between a universal compulsion and.

to be literal, local option. Any admirer of Lindsay will observe with distrust the growing emphasis on the sermonizing features of his work. Even his Heaven is uninviting; a Nirvana of communal kitchens, daily parades and a Beauty scrubbed and worshiped with prescribed regularity. In "The Eagle That is Forgotten," "Sunshine" and others of the poems already mentioned, there was a successful mingling of poet and pamphleteer. But in the present volume it is somewhat disturbing to witness Lindsay hitching his clipped Pegasus in front of the meeting-house, mounting the worn-out steps and going into the pulpit to deliver himself of such orotund banalities as "God Send the Regicide," "Where is the Real Non-Resistant?" and the still flatter wordiness of rhymes like:

When Bryan speaks, the sky is ours, The wheat, the forests, and the flowers. And who is here to say us nay? Fled are the ancient tyrant powers.

When Bryan speaks, then I rejoice. His is the strange composite voice Of many million singing souls Who make world-brotherhood their choice.

When he forgets to preach, or when the preachment takes on a less predetermined and more unconscious tone (as in the highly-colored "Tale of the Tiger Tree" and the brightly ironic "Here's to the Mice"), he regains his power—a power with an artistic dignity that his revivalistic gusto scarcely reaches. It is a relief to turn to those poems in which Lindsay's native fancy is given full swing. To "The Ghosts of the Buffaloes," where he takes the reader on a midnight

92

scamper with nothing more purposeful than the driving power of the imagination. Or to the "The Prairie Battlements." Here again he is not trying to prove anything or convince any one; he is concerned only with trying to snare a glimmering and elusive loveliness. No village improvement societies will embroider this on their banners; no anti-vice crusaders will take it up as a slogan. And yet I like to feel that the real Lindsay is in these unofficial and merely beautiful poems. Or witness these lines, a part of "The Broncho That Would Not Be Broken":

The grasshoppers cheered. "Keep whirling," they said. The insolent sparrows called from the shed "If men will not laugh, make them wish they were dead." But arch were your thoughts, all malice displacing, Though the horse-killers came, with snake-whips advancing, You bantered and cantered away your last chance. And they scourged you, with Hell in their speech and their faces,

O broncho that would not be broken of dancing.

"Nobody cares for you," rattled the crows,
As you dragged the whole reaper, next day, down the rows.
The three mules held back, yet you danced on your toes.
You pulled like a racer, and kept the mules chasing.
You tangled the harness with bright eyes side-glancing,
While the drunk driver bled you—a pole for a lance—
And the giant mules bit at you—keeping their places,
O broncho that would not be broken of dancing.

It is in this homely fantasy, this natural extravagance that Lindsay excels. It runs through things as delicate as the moon poems and as burly as "Simon Legree" with its fallacious moral and its rollicking high spirits. And it is this last quality which will keep Lindsay from

accumulating too fat a churchliness. It is the whimsical buoyancy, the side-spring, the gay appraisal of beauty as he finds it in people, places and art (as he hopes to find it even in politics) that will keep Lindsay the missionary from superseding Lindsay the minstrel. A careless singer of democracy, he goes adventuring with one hand on his lyre and the other on his sword. And the tune that he whistles is "Gaily the Troubadour--".

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CARL SANDBURG

I can begin this chapter on Carl Sandburg in no better way than by admitting the worst thing that most of his adverse critics charge against him-his brutality. And, without hastening to soften this admission, I would like to quote a short passage from a volume to which I have already referred. In Synge's preface to his Poems and Translations (published in 1911) he wrote, "In these days poetry is usually a flower of evil or good; but it is the timber that wears most surely, and there is no timber that has not strong roots among the clay and worms. . . . Even if we grant that exalted poetry can be kept successful by itself, the strong things of life are needed in poetry also, to show that what is exalted or tender is not made by feeble blood. It may almost be said that before verse can be human again, it must learn to be brutal."

John Masefield was the first in England to respond to this rousing prophecy and, with half a dozen racy narratives, he took a generation of readers out of the humid atmosphere of libraries and literary hot-houses. He took them out into the coarse sunlight and the rude air. He brought back to verse that blend of beauty and brutality which is poetry's most human and enduring quality. He rediscovered that rich and almost vulgar vividness that is the life-blood of Chaucer and Shakespeare, of Burns and Rabelais, of Horace and Heine and Villon, and all those who were not only great artists but great humanists. At a time when people were fumbling about,

grasping tentatively at every banal or bizarre novelty in a search for strange things to thrill them, Masefield showed them that they themselves were stranger, wilder and far more thrilling than anything in the world or out of it. He brought a new glamor to poetry; or rather, he brought back the oldest glamor, the splendid illusion of a raw and vigorous reality.

And so Sandburg. With a more uncovered directness and even less fictional disguise, he goes straight to his theme. Turn to the first poem in the volume *Chicago Poems* (Henry Holt & Co., 1916) and observe this uplifted coarseness, this almost animal exultation that is none the less an exaltation.

CHICAGO

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's
Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders:

- They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen your painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys.
- And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.
- And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of women and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.
- And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:
- Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.

Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;

Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage pitted against the wilderness,

Bareheaded,

Shoveling,

Wrecking.

Planning,

Building, breaking, rebuilding;

Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth,

Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs,

Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle,

Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under his ribs the heart of the people,

Laughing!

Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.

Here is a picture of a city and a man. It is brilliant, bold and, for all its loud vigor, visionary. Throughout the book, the poet is strangely like his city. There is the mixture of a gigantic, youthful personality and an older, alien will to mount. This blend of impulses shows even stronger in other sections of the volumes. In "Fogs and Fires" and the more definitely socialistic poems, we see Sandburg's inheritance of Swedish mysticism fused with an American, I might almost say a practical idealism; stubbornness turned to a storm of protest.

There is an affiliated side of Sandburg's power that most of his critics have overlooked, and that is his ability to make language live, to make the words on the printed page sing, dance, bleed, rage, and suffer with the aroused reader. This creative use of proper names and slang, the interlarding of cheapness and nobility which is Sandburg's highly personal idiom, would have given great joy to Whitman. That old barbarian was doubtless dreaming of possible followers when he said that the Leaves of Grass, with its crude vigor, was a sort of enlarged sketch-piece, "a passageway to something, rather than a thing in itself concluded," a language experiment. In that unfinished sketch for a projected lecture (An American Primer) he seemed to be praying for future Sandburgs when he wrote:

"A perfect user of words uses things—they exude in power and beauty from him—miracles from his hands, miracles from his mouth—lilies, clouds, sunshine, women, poured copiously—things, whirled like chain-shot rocks, defiance, compulsion, houses, iron, locomotives, the oak, the pine, the keen eye, the hairy breast, the Texan ranger, the Boston truckman, the woman that arouses a man, the man that arouses a woman.

"Words are magic . . . limber, lasting, fierce words. Do you suppose the liberties and the brawn of These States have to do only with delicate ladywords? with gloved gentleman-words?

"What is the fitness—what the strange charm of aboriginal names?—Monongahela—it rolls with venison richness upon the palate.

"American writers will show far more freedom in the use of names. Ten thousand common, idiomatic words are growing, or are today already grown, out of which vast numbers could be used by American writers, with meaning and effect—words that would be welcomed by the nation, being of the national blood." Turn now, while still on a consideration of words, raciness, and brutality in language, to what is to many the most offensive piece of writing in the volume. It is called "To a Contemporary Bunkshooter" and it begins:

You come along . . . tearing your shirt . . . yelling about Jesus.

Where do you get that stuff? What do you know about Jesus?

Jesus had a way of talking soft and outside of a few bankers and higher-ups among the con men of Jerusalem everybody liked to have this Jesus around because he never made any fake passes and everything he said went and he helped the sick and gave the people hope.

You come along squirting words at us, shaking your fist and calling us all dam fools so fierce the froth slobbers over your lips . . . always blabbing we're all going to hell straight off and you know all about it.

I've read Jesus' words. I know what he said. You don't throw any scare into me. I've got your number. I know how much you know about Jesus.

He never came near clean people or dirty people but they felt cleaner because he came along. It was your crowd of bankers and business men and lawyers hired the sluggers and murderers who put Jesus out of the running.

I say the same bunch backing you nailed the nails into the hands of this Jesus of Nazareth. He had lined up against him the same crooks and strong-arm men now lined up with you paying your way.

Here we have an angry opponent of Billy Sunday answering that frothing evangelist in his own sweet mixture of slang, vilification and religious ecstasy. It is not only a tremendous protest at the falsification of Jesus but a passionate praise of the real martyr. And, inci-

dentally, it is a startling experiment in the use of words. It seems almost a direct answer to Whitman's insistence that before the coming poets could become powerful, they would have to learn the use of hard and powerful words; the greatest artists are, he affirmed, always simple and direct, never merely "polite or obscure." He loved violence in language. "The appetite of the people of These States, in talk, in popular speeches and writings, is for unhemmed latitude, coarseness, directness, live epithets, expletives, words of opprobrium, resistance.—This I understand because I have the taste myself as largely as any one. I have pleasure in the use, on fit occasion, of 'traitor,' 'coward,' 'liar,' 'shyster,' 'skulk,' 'doughface,' 'trickster,' 'backslider,' 'thief,' 'impotent,' 'lickspittle.'"

There are, of course, times when, in the midst of rugged beauties, Sandburg exalts not beauty but mere ruggedness. He often becomes vociferous about "big stuff," "red guts," and the things which, on the printed page, are never strong but are only the stereotypes of strength. Sometimes he is so in love with the physical quality of Strength itself that one hears his adjectives creak in a straining effort to achieve it. See, for instance, such merely showy affairs as "Killers," "Fight," and one or two others. They put one in mind of a professional strong man in the glare of the footlights, of virility in front of a mirror, of an epithet exhibiting its muscle.

But, if any one imagines that Sandburg excels only in verse that is stentorian and heavy-fisted, let him turn to the page that immediately follows the title-poem. A greater contrast is inconceivable. This is the delicate and almost silent poem:

SKETCH

The shadows of the ships Rock on the crest In the low blue lustre Of the tardy and the soft inrolling tide.

A long brown bar at the dip of the sky Puts an arm of sand in the span of salt.

The lucid and endless wrinkles
Draw in, lapse and withdraw.
Wavelets crumble and white spent bubbles
Wash on the floor of the beach.

Rocking on the crest In the low blue lustre Are the shadows of the ships.

or, two pages further on, witness this:

LOST

Desolate and lone
All night long on the lake
Where fog trails and mist creeps,
The whistle of a boat
Calls and cries unendingly,
Like some lost child
In tears and trouble
Hunting the harbor's breast
And the harbor's eyes.

Here we see what I think is Sandburg's finest artistic quality—the sharp and sympathetic gift of the etcher with his firm, clean-cut and always suggestive line. And the passion against injustice, against the economic horrors that stamp out beauty and kill even the hunger for it, cries equally through these more delicately-drawn pieces.

Read, for utter poignance, "Graceland," "Anna Imroth," "Mill-Doors," "Onion Days," "Masses." Or this even more wearied and pathetic poem:

HALSTED STREET CAR

Come, you cartoonists, Hang on a strap with me here At seven o'clock in the morning On a Halsted street car.

Take your pencils
And draw these faces.

Try with your pencils for these crooked faces, That pig-sticker in one corner—his mouth. That overall factory girl—her loose cheeks.

Find for your pencils

A way to mark your memory

Of tired empty faces.

After their night's sleep, In the moist dawn And cool daybreak, Faces Tired of wishes, Empty of dreams.

Here again, as in "They Will Say," "Fish Crier," "Fog" and a dozen others, one sees how Sandburg evokes background and actors, a story or sorrow, with the fewest possible strokes and with a sympathy that none of our poets can surpass. His hate, a strengthening and challenging force, would distort and overbalance the effect of his work, were it not exceeded by the fiercer virility of his love. No writer in America is so hard and soft-speaking; beneath the brutality, he is possibly the ten-

derest of living poets. Read, as an instance, the poem on page 89:

MURMURINGS IN A FIELD HOSPITAL

[They picked him up in the grass where he had lain two days in the rain with a piece of shrapnel in his lungs.]

Come to me only with playthings now . . . A picture of a singing woman with blue eyes

Standing at a fence of hollyhocks, poppies and sunflowers . . .

Or an old man I remember sitting with children telling stories

Of days that never happened anywhere in the world . . .

No more iron cold and real to handle, Shaped for a drive straight ahead. Bring me only beautiful useless things. Only old home things touched at sunset in the quiet . . .

And at the window one day in summer Yellow of the new crock of butter Stood against the red of new climbing roses . . . And the world was all playthings.

It is this delicate touch, this exquisite poignancy that makes Sandburg's harsher commentaries doubly important. His anger at conditions and his hate of cruelty proceed from an intense understanding of men's thwarted desires and dreams. This lavish but never sentimental pity shines out of all his work. It glows through poems like "Fellow Citizens," "Population Drifts," "The Harbor" and burns through the half-material, half-mystic "Choices," "Limited" (a sadness edged with irony) and the unforgettable, stern pathos of

A FENCE

Now the stone house on the lake front is finished and the workmen are beginning the fence.

The palings are made of iron bars with steel points that can stab the life out of any man who falls on them.

As a fence, it is a masterpiece, and will shut off the rabble and all vagabonds and hungry men and all wandering children looking for a place to play.

Passing through the bars and over the steel points will go nothing except Death and the Rain and Tomorrow.

Throughout the volume one is continually surprised to see so personal a twin picture; a double exposure, I might say, of a man and a city. In spite of a few affectations of idiom and twisted lines which lead up the same literary blind-alley that Ezra Pound has chosen as his habitat, *Chicago Poems* is a fresh proof of how our poetry has grown more vigorous and, at the same time, more visionary. It is made of rough timber; it has "strong roots in the clay and worms."

In the new volume, Cornhuskers (Henry Holt & Co., 1918), there is the same animal and spiritual blend, the same uplifted vulgarity; but here it is far more coordinated and restrained. The gain in power is evident with the very first poem, a magnificent panoramic vision of the prairie that begins:

I was born on the prairie and the milk of its wheat, the red of its clover, the eyes of its women, gave me a song and a slogan.

Here the water went down, the icebergs slid with gravel, the gaps and the valleys hissed, and the black loam came, and the yellow sandy loam.

Here between the sheds of the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachians, here now a morning star fixes a fire sign over the timber claims and cow pastures, the corn belt, the cattle ranches.

Here the gray geese go five hundred miles and back with a wind under their wings, honking the cry for a new home.

Here I know I will hanker after nothing so much as one more sunrise or a sky moon of fire doubled to a river moon of water.

The prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the night I rest easy in the prairie arms, on the prairie heart!

After the sunburn of the day handling a pitchfork at a hayrack, after the eggs and biscuit and coffee, the pearl-gray haystacks in the gloaming are cool prayers to the harvest hands.

In the city among the walls the overland passenger train is choked and the pistons hiss and the wheels curse.

On the prairie the overland flits on phantom wheels and the sky and the soil between them muffle the pistons and cheer the wheels.

I am here when the cities are gone.
I am here before the cities come.
I nourished the lonely men on horses.
I will keep the laughing men who ride iron.
I am dust of men.

These are the sonorous, opening lines of the volume, a wider and more confident rhythm than Sandburg has yet attempted. The entire collection is similarly strengthened; there is a greater depth and dignity in the later poems, the accent is less vociferous, more vitalizing. Observe the unusual, athletic beauty of "Manitoba Childe Roland," "Always the Mob," "The Four Brothers" and this muscular

PRAYERS OF STEEL

Lay me on an anvil, O God. Beat me and hammer me into a crowbar. Let me pry loose old walls. Let me lift and loosen old foundations.

Lay me on an anvil, O God.

Beat me and hammer me into a steel spike.

Drive me into the girders that hold a skyscraper together.

Take red-hot rivets and fasten me into the central girders.

Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper through blue nights into white stars.

In this volume Sandburg again shows how responsive he is to the limber and idiomatic phrases that are the blood and bones of our speech. His language lives almost as fervidly as the life from which it is taken. Yet here his intensity is seldom raucous. What could be quieter and yet more positive than the calm irony in "Knucks," the pioneer-celebrating "Leather Leggings," the suggestive force in "Interior," the solemn simplicity of "Grass," the epigrammatic brevity of

SOUTHERN PACIFIC

Huntington sleeps in a house six feet long. Huntington dreams of railroads he built and owned. Huntington dreams of ten thousand men saying: Yes, sir.

Blithery sleeps in a house six feet long. Blithery dreams of rails and ties he laid. Blithery dreams of saying to Huntington: Yes, sir.

Huntington, Blithery, sleep in houses six feet long. Similarly notable are the modern rendering of the tablet writing of the fourth millennium B.C. in "Bilbea," the faithful picture of a small town in "Band Concert," the suggestive "Memoir of a Proud Boy," the strange requiem note in

COOL TOMBS

- When Abraham Lincoln was shoveled into the tombs, he forgot the copperheads and the assassin . . . in the dust, in the cool tombs.
- And Ulysses Grant lost all thought of con men and Wall Street, cash and collateral turned ashes . . . in the dust, in the cool tombs.
- Pocahontas' body, lovely as a poplar, sweet as a red haw in November or a pawpaw in May, did she wonder? does she remember? . . . in the dust, in the cool tombs?
- Take any streetful of people buying clothes and groceries, cheering a hero or throwing confetti and blowing tin horns . . . tell me if the lovers are losers . . . tell me if any get more than the lovers . . . in the dust . . . in the cool tombs.

This fresh blend of proper names and slang, which would so have delighted Whitman, is Sandburg's most characteristic idiom and is used with excellent effect in Cornhuskers. And it is this mingling that enriches his heritage of mingled blood. Beneath the slang one is aware of the mystic. The poet has learned to give his penetrative patois a cosmic significance; he gives us Swedenborg in terms of State Street. This peculiar mysticism looks out of "Caboose Thoughts," "Wilderness," "Localities," "Old Timers," "Potato Blossom Songs and Jigs." There is a more extended and musical spirituality here than was contained in the earlier volume;

a quality that is no less dynamic but far more lyric. There have been few rhymed poems that blend sweetness and sonority more skilfully than some of the lyrics in the sections "Haunts" and "Persons Half Known." Notice the subtle flow of "Laughing Corn," the tympanic syllables in "Drumnotes," and the almost feminine grace of this poem from the latter division, a tribute to a singer who died just as she had begun to sing:

ADELAIDE CRAPSEY *

Among the bumble-bees in red-top hay, a freckled field of brown-eyed Susans dripping yellow leaves in July, I read your heart in a book.

And your mouth of blue pansy—I know somewhere I have seen it rain-shattered.

And I have seen a woman with her head flung between her naked knees, and her head held there listening to the sea, the great naked sea shouldering a load of salt.

And the blue pansy mouth sang to the sea:

Mother of God, I'm so little a thing,

Let me sing longer,

Only a little longer.

And the sea shouldered its salt in long gray combers hauling new shapes on the beach sand.

And here is an example of a mood that Sandburg mirrors so skilfully, a cloudy loveliness reflected in the hazy outlines of the free-rhythmed, unrhymed lyric:

RIVER ROADS

Let the crows go by hawking their caw and caw.

They have been swimming in midnights of coal mines somewhere.

Let 'em hawk their caw and caw.

* See page 318.

Let the woodpecker drum and drum on a hickory stump. He has been swimming in red and blue pools somewhere

hundreds of years

And the blue has gone to his wings and the red has gone to his head.

Let his red head drum and drum.

Let the dark pools hold the birds in a looking-glass.

And if the pool wishes, let it shiver to the blur of many wings, old swimmers from old places.

Let the redwing streak a line of vermilion on the green wood lines.

And the mist along the river fix its purple in lines of a woman's shawl on lazy shoulders.

Here, in the work of Sandburg, is another phase of the new and definitely American spirit in our poetry. Here, in spite of its moments of delicacy, is no trace of delicate languors, of passion extracted from songs or life that is gleaned in a library. This is something carved out of earth, showing the dirt and the yellow clay; there are great gaps and boulders here, steaming ditches and the deep-chested laughter of workers quarreling, forgetting, building. As of Leaves of Grass, it can be said that he "who touches this book touches a man"—and there is nothing arts-and-crafty about him. Brutal, tender, full of anger and pity, his lines run light as a child's pleasure or stumble along with the heavy grace of a hunky; common as sunlight or talk on Third Avenue of a Saturday. Rough-hewn and stolid; perhaps a bit too conscious of its biceps; too proud of the way its thumping feet trample down quiet places. But going on, on . . . gladly, doggedly; with a kind of large and casual ecstasy. One thinks of a dark sea with its tides tossing and shouting. Or the streets of a crowd-filled city when a great wind runs through them.

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

AT first glance, Edwin Arlington Robinson seems one of the most important and, at the same time, one of the least American of our poets. The influence of Browning and the accent of something traditionally English are an obvious feature of his verse. But beneath the superficial indebtedness, no living writer has achieved a more personal and a more indigenous idiom; his ironic studies of character are as sharp as Masters', his backgrounds of New England as faithfully native as Frost's. Seldom buoyant and never brash, Robinson responds to other qualities that are considered less national but are no less His shrewd appraisals, his careful cynicism, his reticence that screens a vigorous psychology—these are the direct results of his distinctly Puritan inheritance. The sharp epithet, the condensation, the direct and simple speech-American poetry has been given a fresh character by these things. And it owes much of their use to the careful art of Robinson.

When most of the preceding generation were poeticizing in ornate and artificial numbers, he was the first to express himself in that hard and clear utterance which became part of our present technique and, later on, was adopted as one of the chief articles in the creed of the Imagists. He has already found direct disciples in poets like Joyce Kilmer (vide his "Martin") and William Stanley Braithwaite ("Sandy Star" and other verses). Unperturbed by the battles over new forms and metrical innovations, he has gone on, like every first-rate artist.

making old forms distinctive and definitely his own. His rhymes are brought in with a masterly ease, showing what rhyme, at its best, should be: a natural, musical punctuation. They flow, like his lines, as smoothly and pointedly as a sharp conversation.

His precise and almost astringent tone is in itself a curious study. Robinson's idiom, though a simple one to read, is not always an easy one to understand. It is a simplicity that is sometimes deceptive and often circumlocutory. He speaks of a hypodermic needle as "a slight kind of engine"; billiard balls are referred to, in a sort of indirect irony, as "three spheres of insidious ivory." It is not because Robinson is fond of words that he indulges in such roundabout rhetoric; it is the occasional mistake of an essentially direct mind in an effort to avoid baldness. Usually Robinson is not only economic but actually close-fisted with his clipped phrases; sometimes in his desire to get rid of excess verbiage, he throws away everything but the meaning—and keeps that to himself. He is often like a sculptor who takes an old statue, and, in order to give it fresh vitality, cuts away the insipid ornaments and floral excrescences that spoil a simple outline. But having removed the irritating fripperies, Robinson goes further. In an effort to get below the cheap superficials, he occasionally cuts so far below the surface that he actually sacrifices the stark outline that he was most anxious to keep.

Let me drop the clumsy, confining metaphor and turn to Robinson's first volume. In *Children of the Night* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897) there are a few poems that illustrate how Robinson in an effort for the brightest clarity ends in a dazzling obscurity. Observe "Fleming Helphenstine" and several of the untitled sonnets. Or

regard, for still better illustrations, such poems in the succeeding volume as "Calverly's," "Leffingwell" and "Atherton's Gambit," and observe how everything is straight and simple except Robinson's thought. The words themselves are direct, the individual phrases are skilful and precise, the language full of a rich intellectuality—but there has been so much pruning and paring that the story element often escapes. But it is not lost; it can be captured and held. Another reading usually brings it nearer, and a sympathetic effort to reach the matter through Robinson's manner will reward the reader with surprising flashes of a beauty that is none the less persuasive for being cerebral.

If from these sentences I give the impression that Robinson is difficult reading, I have written more clumsily than usual. It is, in fact, rare that he is quite so cryptic; rarer still that his poems withdraw into cloudiness. In the main, they are full of sunlight, sunlight so strong that we have to look two or three times before we can see all the details it plays upon. In the first volume we find at least half a dozen examples of such brilliance. The title-poem is a triumphant vindication of the spirit that questions, of the courageous self rising above darkness and doubt. This is the ending of "The Children of the Night":

There is one creed, and only one, That glorifies God's excellence; So cherish, that His will be done, The common creed of common sense.

It is the crimson, not the gray, That charms the twilight of all time; It is the promise of the day That makes the starry sky sublime;

It is the faith within the fear That holds us to the life we curse;— So let us in ourselves revere The Self which is the Universe!

Let us, the Children of the Night, Put off the cloak that hides the scar! Let us be Children of the Light, And tell the ages what we are!

The most important things in this volume are Robinson's astringent character delineations. But the most interesting thing is the way in which he has triumphed technically over his medium, particularly in the use of the old French forms and their English counterparts. He takes both ballad and ballade and, infusing a fresh energy of language, makes them as modern as his most intraverted studies. See, for instance, how he uses a form as light as the idyllic little villanelle and achieves a poem as somber and intense as:

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

They are all gone away, The House is shut and still, There is nothing more to say.

Through broken walls and gray The winds blow bleak and shrill: They are all gone away.

Nor is there one to-day To speak them good or ill: There is nothing more to say.

Why is it then we stray Around that sunken sill? They are all gone away. And our poor fancy-play For them is wasted skill: There is nothing more to say.

There is ruin and decay In the House on the Hill: They are all gone away; There is nothing more to say.

But it is in the etchings of personalities that Robinson is at his height. Few things could be more revealing in their very inconsequential tone than

JAMES WETHERELL

We never half believed the stuff
They told about James Wetherell;
We always liked him well enough,
And always tried to use him well;
But now some things have come to light,
And James has vanished from our view,—
There isn't very much to write,
There isn't very much to do.

or this half-cynical, half-mystical portrait of

CLIFF KLINGENHAGEN

Cliff Klingenhagen had me in to dine With him one day; and after soup and meat, And all the other things there were to eat, Cliff took two glasses and filled one with wine And one with wormwood. Then, without a sign For me to choose at all, he took the draught Of bitterness himself, and lightly quaffed It off, and said the other one was mine.

And when I asked him what the deuce he meant By doing that, he only looked at me And grinned, and said it was a way of his.

And though I know the fellow, I have spent Long time a-wondering when I shall be As happy as Cliff Klingenhagen is.

Observe also the sharp sketches of "Aaron Stark," "Luke Havergal," "Reuben Bright." All of these are drawn with a sure and energizing touch. And none of the people in Masters' Spoon River (to which many of these characters bear an odd resemblance, a sort of avuncular relation) is pictured more surely and unforgettably than:

RICHARD CORY

Whenever Richard Cory went down town, We people on the pavement looked at him: He was a gentleman from sole to crown, Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed, And he was always human when he talked; But still he fluttered pulses when he said, "Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich,—yes, richer than a king,— And admirably schooled in every grace; In fine, we thought that he was everything To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light, And went without the meat, and cursed the bread; And Richard Cory, one calm summer night, Went home and put a bullet through his head.

I would like to quote some of the less personal but equally powerful sonnets, particularly "Supremacy" and "The Clerks." But I must proceed to the following volume. Captain Craig was issued in 1902 by Houghton

Mifflin Co., and in 1915 The Macmillan Co. brought out a revised edition with several additional poems. It is from the Macmillan publication that I quote, for one of the added poems it contains is one of Robinson's finest efforts. It is "The Field of Glory," a piece where Robinson's irony is inextricably mingled with his tenderness.

War shook the land where Levi dwelt, And fired the dismal wrath he felt, That such a doom was ever wrought As his, to toil while others fought; To toil, to dream—and still to dream, With one day barren as another; To consummate, as it would seem, The dry despair of his old mother.

Far off one afternoon began
The sound of man destroying man;
And Levi, sick with nameless rage,
Condemned again his heritage,
And sighed for scars that might have come,
And would, if once he could have sundered
Those harsh, inhering claims of home
That held him while he cursed and wondered.

Another day, and then there came, Rough, bloody, ribald, hungry, lame, But yet themselves, to Levi's door, Two remnants of the day before. They laughed at him and what he sought; They jeered him, and his painful acre; But Levi knew that they had fought, And left their manners to their Maker.

That night, for the grim widow's ears, With hopes that hid themselves in fears, He told of arms, and featly deeds, Whereat one leaps the while he reads,

And said he'd be no more a clown, While other drew the breath of battle.— The mother looked him up and down, And laughed—a scant laugh with a rattle.

She told him what she found to tell,
And Levi listened, and heard well
Some admonitions of a voice
That left him no cause to rejoice.
He sought a friend, and found the stars,
And prayed aloud that they should aid him;
But they said not a word of wars,
Or of a reason why God made him.

And who's of this or that estate
We do not wholly calculate,
When baffling shades that shift and cling
Are not without their glimmering;
When even Levi, tired of faith,
Beloved of none, forgot by many,
Dismissed as an inferior wraith,
Reborn may be as great as any.

The new edition also contains a set of delightful variations on Greek themes, one of the most graceful of which is

LAIS TO APHRODITE

When I, poor Laïs, with my crown Of beauty could laugh Hellas down, Young lovers crowded at my door, Where now my lovers come no more.

So, Goddess, you will not refuse A mirror that has now no use; For what I was I cannot be, And what I am I will not see.

As for the long title-poem, "Captain Craig" is an eighty-four page account of the decline of a picturesque

old vagabond, his four young friends and the interminable letters he writes them. Miss Lowell in the most penetrative chapter in her Tendencies in Modern American Poetry says that the poem is built upon that favorite theory of Robinson's: "the success of failure." There is no little truth in this estimate, but often the poem seems nothing half so heroic. For all its technical sprightliness and dialectic repartee, there is something a bit owlish in its unblinking seriousness, even in its irony. Captain Craig himself seems less a character-study than a peg on which to hang a great quantity of brilliant, sometimes beautiful but finally tiresome talk.

The succeeding poem is a far more eloquent affair. In "Isaac and Archibald" we have not only one of the poet's kindest analyses but one of Robinson's few glimpses of his boyhood. The drawing of the two old men, each separately confiding in the lad their fears for each other and, unconsciously, for themselves, is one of the most touching (as it is one of the most native) pictures in the gallery of American art. This is the dignified ending, as the two companions sit down to a game of seven-up and the boy keeps count:

So I remember, even to this day,
Just how they sounded, how they placed themselves,
And how the game went on while I made marks
And crossed them out, and meanwhile made some
Trojans.

Likewise I made Ulysses, after Isaac, And a little after Flaxman. Archibald Was wounded when he found himself left out, But he had no heroics, and I said so: I told him that his white beard was too long And too straight down to be like things in Homer. "Quite so," said Isaac.—"Low," said Archibald;

And he threw down a deuce with a deep grin
That showed his yellow teeth and made me happy.
So they played on till a bell rang from the door,
And Archibald said, "Supper."—After that
The old men smoked while I sat watching them
And wondered with all comfort what might come
To me, and what might never come to me;
And when the time came for the long walk home
With Isaac in the twilight, I could see
The forest and the sunset and the sky-line,
No matter where it was that I was looking:
The flame beyond the boundary, the music,
The foam and the white ships, and two old men
Were things that would not leave me.—And that
night

There came to me a dream—a shining one,
With two old angels in it. They had wings,
And they were sitting where a silver light
Suffused them, face to face. The wings of one
Began to palpitate as I approached,
But I was yet unseen when a dry voice
Cried thinly, with unpatronizing triumph,
"I've got you, Isaac; high, low, jack, and the game."

Isaac and Archibald have gone their way
To the silence of the loved and well-forgotten.
I knew them, and I may have laughed at them;
But there's a laughing that has honor in it,
And I have no regret for light words now.
Rather I think sometimes they may have made
Their sport of me;—but they would not do that,
They were too old for that. They were old men,
And I may laugh at them because I knew them.

The next volume, The Town down the River (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), shows an ever surer and more versatile turn of speech than the previous volumes. This is Robinson's second-best and probably his most generally admired book. It begins splendidly with a poem to

Lincoln in his terse, epigrammatic style, a style that seems at first to be almost too dry and close-packed, but which mellows gradually into something quite different than its hard contours. Of all the tributes to the great emancipator, this is one of the few that maintains a genuine nobility and practically the only one that does not try to show the man's intimate humanity by some reference to rail-splitting and the use of "Honest Abe." Without descending from his austere level, Robinson actually comes nearer Lincoln than any of his compatriots. These are the last three verses of "The Master":

For he, to whom we had applied Our shopman's test of age and worth, Was elemental when he died, As he was ancient at his birth: The saddest among kings of earth, Bowed with a galling crown, this man Met rancor with a cryptic mirth, Laconic—and Olympian.

The love, the grandeur, and the fame Are bounded by the world alone; The calm, the smouldering, and the flame Of awful patience were his own: With him they are forever flown Past all our fond self-shadowings, Wherewith we cumber the Unknown As with inept, Icarian wings.

For we were not as other men:
'Twas ours to soar and his to see.
But we are coming down again,
And we shall come down pleasantly;
Nor shall we longer disagree
On what it is to be sublime,
But flourish in our perigee
And have one Titan at a time.

One passes the poem to Roosevelt, entitled "The Revealer," with as much charity as possible. One passes it more quickly because of such chiseled sonnets as "Shadrach O'Leary," "Alma Mater," "The Sunken Crown" and this brief revelation of a dying man and his physician, told by the latter:

HOW ANNANDALE WENT OUT

- "They called it Annandale—and I was there To flourish, to find words, and to attend: Liar, physician, hypocrite, and friend, I watched him; and the sight was not so fair As one or two that I have seen elsewhere: An apparatus not for me to mend—A wreck, with hell between him and the end, Remained of Annandale; and I was there.
- "I knew the ruin as I knew the man;
 So put the two together, if you can,
 Remembering the worst you know of me.
 Now view yourself as I was, on the spot—
 With a slight kind of engine. Do you see?
 Like this . . . You wouldn't hang me? I
 thought not."

The long monolog of Napoleon on Saint Helena is frankly disappointing; it is neither tragic nor tender, merely petulant. And, what is worse, it is almost dull—one of Robinson's few uninteresting passages. A few pages further on we come, with an abrupt contrast, to one of Robinson's liveliest moments. In the whimsical appraisal of the shiftless romanticist the poet has unforgettably etched a character with strokes that are light but that go deep.

Edwin Arlington Robinson

MINIVER CHEEVY

Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn, Grew lean while he assailed the seasons; He wept that he was ever born, And he had reasons.

Miniver loved the days of old
When swords were bright and steeds were
prancing;
The vision of a warrior bold
Would set him dancing.

Miniver sighed for what was not, And dreamed, and rested from his labors; He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot, And Priam's neighbors.

Miniver mourned the ripe renown That made so many a name so fragrant; He mourned Romance, now on the town, And Art, a vagrant.

Miniver loved the Medici, Albeit he had never seen one; He would have sinned incessantly Could he have been one.

Miniver cursed the commonplace And eyed a khaki suit with loathing; He missed the mediaeval grace Of iron clothing.

Miniver scorned the gold he sought, But sore annoyed was he without it; Miniver thought, and thought, and thought, And thought about it.

Miniver Cheevy, born too late, Scratched his head and kept on thinking; Miniver coughed, and called it fate, And kept on drinking.

All three of these volumes, excellent in themselves, seem little more than a succession of preludes for the dynamic volume which was to establish Robinson in the first rank of American poets. But the period of gestation was long, and Robinson's art was rising from an almost over-intellectualized impetus slowly into a stronger growth. Meanwhile he published two plays, the first in 1914, the second in 1915. Both of them show clearly that Robinson is far more dramatic as a writer of ballads than as a dramatist. As play-writing they are decidedly inferior stuff; as a communication they seem both dubious and derivative. The Porcupine reads like a queer composite of Ibsen and Chekhov; Van Zorn is an even queerer blend of Ibsen and Charles Rann Kennedy.

The following year Robinson published his fullest and most representative work; a fusing of all his gifts. In The Man Against the Sky (The Macmillan Co., 1916) we not only have all of Robinson in one hundred and fifty pages; we have him unfalteringly at his best. I have already said that the preceding volumes were, for all their penetrative vigor, only preparations for this intellectually robust and far more varied work. He're the human sympathy is deepened; the epigrammatic turns are sharper; there is even a more definitely lyric note in such poems as the eloquent "Flammonde," the highly dramatic scene ironically entitled "The Clinging Vine," the delicately satiric "Bokardo" and this still more gentle piece of disillusion and sympathy:

THE GIFT OF GOD
Blessed with a joy that only she
Of all alive shall ever know,
She wears a proud humility
For what it was that willed it so,—

Edwin Arlington Robinson

That her degree should be so great Among the favored of the Lord That she may scarcely bear the weight Of her bewildering reward.

As one apart, immune, alone,
Or featured for the shining ones,
And like to none that she has known
Of other women's other sons,—
The firm fruition of her need,
He shines anointed; and he blurs
Her vision, till it seems indeed
A sacrilege to call him hers.

She fears a little for so much Of what is best, and hardly dares To think of him as one to touch With aches, indignities, and cares; She sees him rather at the goal, Still shining; and her dream foretells The proper shining of a soul Where nothing ordinary dwells.

Perchance a canvass of the town
Would find him far from flags and shouts,
And leave him only the renown
Of many smiles and many doubts;
Perchance the crude and common tongue
Would havoc strangely with his worth;
But she, with innocence unwrung,
Would read his name around the earth.

And others, knowing how this youth Would shine, if love could make him great, When caught and tortured for the truth Would only writhe and hesitate; While she, arranging for his days What centuries could not fulfill, Transmutes him with her faith and praise, And has him shining where she will.

She crowns him with her gratefulness, And says again that life is good; And should the gift of God be less In him than in her motherhood, His fame, though vague, will not be small, As upward through her dream he fares, Half clouded with a crimson fall Of roses thrown on marble stairs.

In this volume we notice with greater emphasis how strict and simple are the forms Robinson uses and how much he is at home in them. Even the rhyme-schemes are free of any twist or innovation. He takes patterns that are severe and anything but original and, without an effort to change the shape, makes them somehow his own. In fact, some of the most intense and serious things he has written are cast in the identical light-verse stanzas of Austin Dobson, C. S. Calverlev and Locker-Lampson. These poems are, in themselves, a complete refutation of the still persisting theory that nothing psychological, nothing probing or intimately sensitive in short, that nothing "new"—can be expressed in the old forms (vide Mr. Edward Storer), that rhyme and a regular rhythm will, in a few years, be practically obsolete. Such brilliant and analytic verse as Robinson's completely explodes the fallacy that (I quote Mr. Storer's conclusion) "a poet who wishes to give expression to realities in modern life . . . will find that he is confined for his literary expression to the two media of prose and free verse." Page after page in this collection refutes this exceedingly impressionistic dictum. Observe the intricate mental processes revealed in eight lines as regular as these from "Flammonde":

> How much it was of him we met We cannot ever know; nor yet

Shall all he gave us quite atone
For what was his, and his alone;
Nor need we now, since he knew best,
Nourish an ethical unrest:
Rarely at once will nature give
The power to be Flammonde and live.

Or note how the "realities in modern life" are made still more pointed in evenly-rhymed poems like "Old King Cole," with its mellow nonchalance, the obviously scientific diagnosis in "Eros Turannos" with its unexpected picturesque climax, the Freudian analysis of repressed desire in "Llewellyn and the Tree." And what could be more surprising than the way Robinson achieves modernity of thought through a medium as old as the ballad form? Here is his remarkably turned dialogballad:

JOHN GORHAM

"Tell me what you're doing over here, John Gorham, Sighing hard and seeming to be sorry when you're not; Make me laugh or let me go now, for long faces in the moonlight

Are a sign for me to say again a word that you forgot."—

"I'm over here to tell you what the moon already
May have said or maybe shouted ever since a year ago;
I'm over here to tell you what you are, Jane Wayland,
And to make you rather sorry, I should say, for
being so."—

"Tell me what you're saying to me now, John Gorham, Or you'll never see as much of me as ribbons any more; I'll vanish in as many ways as I have toes and fingers, And you'll not follow far for one where flocks have been before."—

"I'm sorry now you never saw the flocks, Jane Wayland, But you're the one to make of them as many as you need. And then about the vanishing. It's I who mean to vanish; And when I'm here no longer you'll be done with me indeed."—

"That's a way to tell me what I am, John Gorham! How am I to know myself until I make you smile? Try to look as if the moon were making faces at you, And a little more as if you meant to stay a little while."—

"You are what it is that over rose-blown gardens Makes a pretty flutter for a season in the sun; You are what it is that with a mouse, Jane Wayland, Catches him and let's him go and eats him up for fun."—

"Sure I never took you for a mouse, John Gorham; All you say is easy, but so far from being true, That I wish you wouldn't ever be again the one to think so; For it isn't cats and butterflies that I would be to you."—

"All your little animals are in one picture—
One I've had before me since a year ago to-night;
And the picture where they live will be of you, Jane
Wayland,

Till you find a way to kill them or to keep them out of sight."—

"Won't you ever see me as I am, John Gorham, Leaving out the foolishness and all I never meant? Somewhere in me there's a woman, if you know the way to find her.

Will you like me any better if I prove it and repent?"

"I doubt if I shall ever have the time, Jane Wayland; And I dare say all this moonlight lying round us might as well

Fall for nothing on the shards of broken urns that are forgotten,

As on two that have no longer much of anything to tell."

The last stanza of this poem, which can stand among the author's best, illustrates the growth of his power of summary. It is particularly effective when; at the end of an unusually involved poem, Robinson suddenly caps the whole thing with a simile that is so brilliant in epithet as to be startlingly epigrammatic. In the sonnet to George Crabbe (in *Children of the Night*) we have this memorable sextet:

Whether or not we read him, we can feel From time to time the vigor of his name Against us like a finger for the shame And emptiness of what our souls reveal In books that are as altars where we kneel To consecrate the flicker, not the flame.

Or these two lines, from an unnamed octave in the same volume:

Wisdom shafts the darkness here and there, Like scattered lamps in unfrequented streets.

Or this ending from "Hillcrest" in The Man Against the Sky:

Far journeys and hard wandering Await him in whose crude surmise Peace, like a mask, hides everything That is and has been from his eyes;

And all his wisdom is unfound, Or like a web that error weaves On airy looms that have a sound No louder now than falling leaves.

And this beautiful figure that concludes "Eros Turannos":

Meanwhile we do no harm; for they
That with a god have striven,
Not hearing much of what we say,
Take what the god has given;
Though like waves breaking it may be,
Or like a changed familiar tree,
Or like a stairway to the sea
Where down the blind are driven.

There are two other poems in this volume that call for more extended notice than I can possibly give. One is the title-poem that brings the book to a high and splendid finale; the other is "Ben Jonson Entertains a Man from Stratford." Here, in spite of the four hundred lines of blank verse, Robinson's firm pencil does not waver; he has succeeded in drawing the clearest and most human portrait of Shakespeare that has been attempted by any one, with the possible exception of Georg Brandes and Frank Harris. Even in the trivialities of conversation (where Jonson is sketched almost as unerringly as his friend and master) the interpretive power rises. Here is an illustrative fragment:

I'll meet him out alone of a bright Sunday,
Trim, rather spruce, and quite the gentleman.
"What ho, my lord!" say I. He doesn't hear me;
Wherefore I have to pause and look at him.
He's not enormous, but one looks at him.
A little on the round if you insist,
For now, God save the mark, he's growing old;
He's five and forty, and to hear him talk
These days you'd call him eighty; then you'd add
More years to that. He's old enough to be
The father of a world, and so he is.
"Ben, you're a scholar, what's the time of day?"
Says he; and there shines out of him again
An aged light that has no age or station—

The mystery that's his—a mischievous
Half-mad serenity that laughs at fame
For being won so easy, and at friends
Who laugh at him for what he wants the most,
And for his dukedom down in Warwickshire:—

And here is a more intense and characteristic passage:

Not long ago, late in an afternoon, I came on him unseen down Lambeth way. And on my life I was afear'd of him: He gloomed and mumbled like a soul from Tophet, His hands behind him and his head bent solemn. "What is it now," said I,—"another woman?" That made him sorry for me, and he smiled. "No, Ben," he mused; "it's Nothing. It's all Nothing. We come, we go; and when we're done, we're done; Spiders and flies—we're mostly one or t'other— We come, we go; and when we're done, we're done." "By God, you sing that song as if you knew it!" Said I, by way of cheering him; "what ails ye?" "I think I must have come down here to think," Says he to that, and pulls his little beard; "Your fly will serve as well as anybody. And what's his hour? He flies, and flies, and flies, And in his fly's mind has a brave appearance; And then your spider gets him in her net, And eats him out, and hangs him up to dry.

That's Nature, the kind mother of all.

And then your slattern housemaid swings her broom,
And where's your spider? And that's Nature, also.

It's Nature, and it's Nothing. It's all Nothing.

It is a world where bugs and emperors
Go singularly back to the same dust,
Each in his time; and the old, ordered stars

That sang together, Ben, will sing the same
Old stave tomorrow."

When he talks like that,
There's nothing for a human man to do
But lead him to some grateful nook like this
Where we be now, and there to make him drink.
He'll drink, for love of me, and then be sick;
A sad sign always in a man of parts,
And always very ominous . . . The great
Should be as large in liquor as in love,—
And our great friend is not so large in either:
One disaffects him, and the other fails him;
Whatso he drinks that has an antic in it,
He's wondering what's to pay in his insides;
And while his eyes are on the Cyprian
He's fribbling all the time with that damned House.

What we have here is nothing so romantically fictitious as the literary hero in terms of the demigod; we have the record of what might well have been a mixture of the immortal genius and a very mortal hankerer after peace, position and small-town prestige. This is the significant end of it:

Tell me, now,
If ever there was anything let loose
On earth by gods or devils heretofore
Like this mad, careful, proud, indifferent
Shakespeare!

Where was it, if it ever was? By heaven, 'Twas never yet in Rhodes or Pergamon—In Thebes or Nineveh, a thing like this! No thing like this was ever out of England; And that he knows. I wonder if he cares. Perhaps he does . . . O Lord, that House in Stratford!

Robinson's latest, *Merlin* (The Macmillan Co., 1917), seems to me to be an interval book. It is, in spite of several exquisite moments, a thing done between larger

matters; a long and labored poem which suffers by comparison with the original on the one hand and with such modern adaptations of historic themes as Lascelles Abercrombie's on the other. Robinson has written all around the Arthurian romance; he has invested it with gorgeous color and a flashing vocabulary; his alert mentality plays through it and transforms it into something extraordinarily complex. He does everything to it, in fact, except vitalize it. The characters all speak the same thoughtful speech intoned in the same precise idiom, and the heavy air of allegory that hangs over the poem makes it still more abstract and distant. begins by being irritating; it ends by being tedious. In the midst of lengthy recitatives, there are individual bits of great beauty, such as the scene where Merlin goes to Broceliande, the passage describing his meeting with Vivian, and the half-lyrical, half-whimsical conversation when they first talk together.

"Are you always all in green, as you are now?" Said Merlin, more employed with her complexion, Where blood and olive made wild harmony With eyes and wayward hair that were too dark For peace if they were not subordinated; "If so you are, then so you make yourself A danger in a world of many dangers. If I were young, God knows if I were safe Concerning you in green, like a slim cedar, As you are now, to say my life was mine: Were you to say to me that I should end it, Longevity for me were jeopardized. Have you your green on always and all over?"

"Come here, and I will tell you about that,"
Said Vivian, leading Merlin with a laugh
To an arbored seat where they made opposites:
"If you are Merlin—and I know you are—

For I remember you in Camelot,—You know that I am Vivian, as I am; And if I go in green, why, let me go so, And say at once why you have come to me Cloaked over like a monk, and with a beard As long as Jeremiah's. I don't like it. I'll never like a man with hair like that While I can feed a carp with little frogs. I'm rather sure to hate you if you keep it, And when I hate a man I poison him."

"You've never fed a carp with little frogs,"
Said Merlin; "I can see it in your eyes."—
"I might then, if I haven't," said the lady.

Whatever the symbolic tale may be—whether it is a parable of "Woman and the light that Galahad found which is to illuminate the world"; or whether, as some of his admirers have maintained, it is the tragic crumbling of beauty and idealism destroyed by the European war—Merlin will remain one of Robinson's lesser works, remarkable not for its philosophy or story-telling, but for its brief interruptions of lyrical intensity and its poignant end:

Fiercer now,
The wind was like a flying animal
That beat the two of them incessantly
With icy wings, and bit them as they went.
The rock above them was an empty place
Where neither seer nor fool should view again
The stricken city. Colder blew the wind
Across the world, and on it heavier lay
The shadow and the burden of the night;
And there was darkness over Camelot.

Still, Merlin is an in-between volume; it would have been too much to expect another The Man Against the

Sky to follow without a break or breathing-spell. Robinson's next volume, I am confident enough to predict, will—... But that is the business of a prophet, not a recorder. As the latter, I venture to estimate that, unless all the laws of average are worthless, the new poems will take their place with Robinson's best—which is the same as saying they will rank with some of the most authentic and representative poetry that America has produced.

AMY LOWELL

To understand the multiple activities of Amy Lowell one must understand at least two of the American qualities that lie at the roots of her diverse energies. I refer to the national zest for argument and the even more national love of experiment. Both are salient characteristics of our youth. But where the former is a sort of spasmodic exercise, an enjoyment of intellectual athletics, the latter is nothing less than a vast and sometimes devastating passion. This country, like a credulous child, has always been a responsive medium for every new fad, cult, school, movement, theory and crusade. No one country has ever had an appetite for so many quack formulas, adopted so many forms of worship, invented so many subdivisions of creeds, fought so lustily for panaceas and programs that it discarded almost immediately in favor of newer ones. For every prohibition that has been urged, we have become intoxicated with a dozen different enthusiasms. No nation or group of nationalities has ever experimented in so many fields at one time. Our sudden and short-lived enthusiasms are staggering; they attempt queer blends of new religions, new sciences, new politics, New Thought. They range all the way from Mormonism to osteopathy; from the anti-vivisection campaigns to the recent down-with-Wagner furore; from the Emmanuel movement to the Mann act. And yet our lust for novelty springs from an unresting curiosity that is our most vital sign of growth. Having no traditions

of our own, we are always nibbling at the old or temporary standards of others. But, with a prodigious health, we are quick to assimilate what we want, though we are slower to reject what is merely sweet-tasting and synthetic food. From this prodigal hunger has sprung our inventiveness; the same experimental impulse that made Christian Science possible, gave us steam navigation, the phonograph, the telephone, the electric light, the aeroplane.

This eager and national restlessness is what underlies Amy Lowell's amazing versatility. Through all her work runs this aesthetic curiosity; it accounts for her preoccupation with technique, color, form and the surfaces of art. It explains why so definitely American a poet could write so sympathetic and authoritative a volume on foreign tendencies as her Six French Poets (The Macmillan Co., 1915). It is her catholicity of taste, her subjugation of prejudices that make such a book not only a notable interpretation but a contribution to American criticism. "A critic," Huneker has written, "will never be a catholic critic of his native literature or art if he does not know the literatures and arts of other lands. . . . Because of our uncritical parochialism, America is comparable to a cemetery of clichés." truth of this metaphor is questionable today—and no one more than Miss Lowell has helped to sweep out the mounds of rubber-stamps, the accumulation of clichés, and to turn our literary graveyards into living places. She has fought the poetic cantwords, the stereotyped expressions with a vigor that is seemingly inexhaustible. Scorn, savage diatribes, ridicule and opponents cannot cripple her: she seems to feed on them. Momentarily downed, she comes up smiling, fresh for

the attack with a larger assortment of high-power expletives than before. A female Roosevelt among the Parnassians.

This brings me to a reconsideration of that argumentative and pugnacious native quality which, I asserted. Miss Lowell so strikingly represented. This phase, I must qualify, is more obvious in her public pronouncements, her prefaces, her lectures, than in her poetry. But her creative work invites, even incites, combat. And it succeeds in its purpose. No poet living in America (possibly no native contemporary writer, with the exception of Dreiser) has been more fought for, fought against and generally fought about than Amy Lowell. The thing which has stirred so many admirations and antagonisms is her implied and often direct challenge to the lazily sentimental reader, to the unquestioning writer, to the placid purveyors of predigested verse. is this positive quality that has caused so much opposition, especially among negative people. For nothing is so irritating to the complacent, conservative mind as a person who tries to stir it up. And nothing is more characteristic of Miss Lowell than her power to arouse. Nor has she been merely an advocate for her school, a special pleader. It is true that in her critical work and general discussions she has taken up the sword for vers libre and the Imagists most frequently; but she has also wielded a lusty cudgel for all of the radicals in poetry and for all the new tendencies in the other arts as well. Nothing could be more descriptive of her dual rôlethe combination of poet and propagandist—than the title of her second volume. Sword Blades and Pobby Seed. . . . But I am proceeding too fast. There is the first volume still to be considered.

In A Dome of Many-Colored Glass (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1912, and reissued in 1915 by Macmillan Co.) it is difficult to discover even the proverbial "promise" of most first books. It is hard to believe that our most radical innovator, our most consistent scorner of old modes could have written such wholly trite verses as the ones entitled "Apples of Hesperides," "Suggested by the Cover of a Volume of Keats's Poems," "The Road to Avignon," "The Boston Athenaeum." And it is equally inconceivable that Miss Lowell, who would cut off her right hand rather than let it commit a cliché, could ever have written such gems of banality as:

Life is a stream
On which we strew
Petal by petal the flower of our heart.

as:

When you, my dear, are away, away, How wearily goes the creeping day.

or such a rubber-stamped inversion as:

Who heard thee singing in the distance dim.

Yet these, and others, are actually on exhibit, preserved in merciless type. There are, of course, somewhat better things in the volume; pieces that have allure and a genuine lyrical flavor. "Hora Stellatrix" is a more musical and much fresher song than its Latin tag would lead one to believe. "Dipsa," "Before the Altar" and "A Fairy Tale" have a certain delicacy of values that we shall find accentuated in her later work, and there are the beginnings of her objective and

histrionic quality in several scattered passages. As an example of the best in this volume and also as a contrast to the poetry and prefaces that followed it, I quote this restrained, old-fashioned and almost moralistic sonnet:

THE LAMP OF LIFE

Always we are following a light,
Always the light recedes; with groping hands
We stretch toward this glory, while the lands
We journey through are hidden from our sight
Dim and mysterious, folded deep in night,
We care not, all our utmost need demands
Is but the light, the light! So still it stands
Surely our own if we exert our might.
Fool! Never can'st thou grasp this fleeting gleam,
Its glowing flame would die if it were caught,
Its value is that it doth always seem
But just a little farther on. Distraught,
But lighted ever onward, we are brought
Upon our way unknowing, in a dream.

On the whole, however, it is a strangely unpromising first book.

Nothing in this volume, as I have said, prepared us for the next one. Nor, for that matter, for the new and surprisingly belligerent Miss Lowell who leaped with a blast from the very first page of Sword Blades and Poppy Seed (The Macmillan Co., 1914). Here her pugnacity is so great that she fights not only with her poems but for them by going into immediate action with a preface which breathlessly argues that "the poet must learn his trade in the same manner and with the same painstaking care as the cabinet-maker," that "poetry should exist simply because it is a created beauty," that "the trees do not teach us moral lessons"

and that "the poet must be constantly seeking new pictures to make his readers feel the vitality of thought." In short, "a work of beauty which cannot stand an intimate examination is a poor and jerry-built thing." Nothing so very startling after all; nothing to bulge the eye or disturb the pulse. And yet there is something in her combined invitation and challenge that makes one get up and hurl arguments at her. One finds one's self explaining, in a much louder voice than one intended, that this prefatory explanation is a trifle gratuitous, that the theory of beauty being its own excuse for being is neither a new nor a revolutionary doctrine, and that the avoidance of old images is instinctive, that the shopworn stock properties of any art are and have always been intuitively shunned by the genuinely creative artist. As to the dictum against poetry trying to teach, one might retort that poetry has taught, does teach and will continue to teach—in the work of such writers who are interested in certain beliefs and who are great enough to embody them in their writing. It is a far more difficult and complex thing to manage, and, possibly, from a purely aesthetic angle, execrable as pure art. And yet it has been done and done beautifully-both from the standpoint of teaching and of poetry. It has been done by the anonymous poets who composed the Old Testament, by Dante when he wrote the "Divine Comedy," by Goethe when he conceived "Faust," by Francis Thompson when he wrote "The Hound of Heaven"by Amy Lowell in her recent war poems and in her latest volume when she spoke up for new Japan in "Guns as Keys: And the Great Gate Swings." True, "we do not ask the trees to teach us moral lessons." We do not (although a Chesterton might convince us that we should), because they have nothing to teach. Trees have this in common with poets, they both live. But one of the things that distinguish a man from a tree is that, while the tree has nothing else but life, man has life and also a theory of it. He is not only a participant but an appraiser; he has the Olympian Identifying himself with the drama of life, he can at the same time sit back and view it in perspective; he is both unconscious actor and conscious critic. And so having, unlike the tree, a criticism of existence he is, in the highest sense, a teacher. There is, of course, no reason why he should descend to plastering his art with the moral maxims employed by Miss Lowell's forbears and so dreaded by Miss Lowell. But neither is there any reason why he should not assume his natural rôle of thinker and so, differing from a non-committal universe "that flings down continents and leaves them without comment," poets will continue to be not only describers and decorators but protagonists and prophets.

These prejudiced opinions are inspired not so much by Miss Lowell's art-work as by her far more dogmatic prose. When one turns from the writer of doctrinaire prefaces to Amy Lowell the writer of poetry, an entirely different personality is encountered. Many of the traits are the same—the vigor, the pugnacity and the power of the sharply cut line—but they are transmuted into something that is more delicate and yet more forceful. What is most striking in this volume is the uncommon sense of hearing a sensitive, aesthetic femininity unbosom itself in a decidedly masculine utterance. Throughout this volume one observes this queer mixture. Miss Lowell's objectivity is so great that she finds one sex insufficient to express herself. Not that she

assumes the male attitude too anxiously or too often; the intellectual form of her work is hermaphroditic rather than sapphic. It assumes both sexes with equal dexterity. Contrast, for instance, so purely feminine a concept as "A Gift" with so lusty and virile a lovesong as "Anticipation." Or turn from the point-lace and lavendar archness of "Apology" to the brusque speech of "The Cyclists" with its speed and incision. Turn to "Vintage," "The Coal Picker," "The Foreigner," and witness the singularly masculine flavor; it gives even the lesser verses a strong, square-shouldered quality. These poems thrust themselves from the pages like a clenched fist.

ANTICIPATION

I have been temperate always,
But I am like to be very drunk
With your coming.
There have been times
I feared to walk down the street
Lest I should reel with the wine of you,
And jerk against my neighbours
As they go by.
I am parched now, and my tongue is horrible
in my mouth,
But my brain is noisy
With the clash and gurgle of filling wine-cups.

Here is the same quality in a more definitely pictorial piece:

THE TAXI

When I go away from you
The world beats dead
Like a slackened drum.
I call out for you against the jutted
stars

And shout into the ridges of the wind.

Streets coming fast,
One after the other,
Wedge you away from me,
And the lamps of the city prick my eyes
So that I can no longer see your face.
Why should I leave you,
To wound myself upon the sharp edges
of the night?

This virility has many degrees. It does something besides exhibit its vigor. It can achieve satire as deep as the quiet but none the less powerful picture of "The Precinct, Rochester" and satire as slight as this:

EPITAPH OF A YOUNG POET WHO DIED BEFORE HAVING ACHIEVED SUCCESS

Beneath this sod lie the remains Of one who died of growing pains.

Possibly Miss Lowell's most individual gift, and one that she uses most effectively, is disclosed in these two lines—her vein of irony. We shall see, in the next volume, how she obtains some of her most dramatic effects by its aid. Here it is somewhat more whimsical, more impelled by sheer loveliness, as in "Music." Sometimes it is mixed with tragedy, as in "Clear, with Variable Winds." And sometimes it is turned to probing analysis, as in "Astigmatism," which is a symbolic but remarkably penetrative appreciation and (despite Miss Lowell's preface) poetic criticism of Ezra Pound's art.

But it is as an experimenter that she is most arresting. Her interest in form is something like a passion with her. And yet even the most tenuous of her imagist

verses have much more than the form as their impetus. So with the experiments in long vers libre and "polyphonic prose," which Miss Lowell with her eager catholicity has adopted from the French. The latter, for instance, becomes a most flexible medium with its prose structure, its irregular meter, its sudden incidental and almost accidental rhymes. Here is a part of one of the most successful:

THE FORSAKEN

Holy Mother of God, Merciful Mary. Hear me! I am very weary. I have come from a village miles away, all day I have been coming, and I ache for such far roaming. I cannot walk as light as I used, and my thoughts grow confused. I am heavier than I was. Mary Mother, you know the cause!

Beautiful Holy Lady, take my shame away from me! Let this fear be only seeming, let it be that I am dreaming. For months I have hoped it was so, now I am afraid I know. Lady, why should this be shame, just because I haven't got his name. He loved me, yes, Lady, he did, and he couldn't keep it hid. We meant to marry. Why did he die?

That day when they told me he had gone down in the avalanche, and could not be found until the snow melted in Spring, I did nothing. I could not cry. Why should he die? Why should he die and his child live? His little child alive in me, for my comfort. No, Good God, for my misery! I cannot face the shame, to be a mother, and not married, and the poor child to be reviled for having no father. Merciful Mother, Holy Virgin, take away this sin I did. Let the baby not be. Only take the stigma off of me!

I have told no one but you, Holy Mary. My mother would call me "whore," and spit upon me; the priest would

have me repent, and have the rest of my life spent in a convent. I am no whore, no bad woman. He loved me, and we were to be married. I carried him always in my heart; what did it matter if I gave him the least part of me too? You were a virgin, Holy Mother, but you had a son, you know there are times when a woman must give all. There is some call to give and hold back nothing. I swear I obeyed God then, and this child who lives in me is the sign. What am I saying? He is dead, my beautiful strong man! I shall never feel him caress me again. This is the only baby I shall have. Oh, Holy Virgin, protect my baby! My little, helpless baby!

The other poems in this elastic manner are more technically skilful, but they are also more theatrical in speech and effect. So, too, are many of the rhymed narratives, particularly the long phantasmagoria of "The Great Adventure of Max Breuck" and the shorter and almost hysterical "After Hearing a Waltz by Bartok." The tendency to theatricalize a theme, to throw in a fire, a murder, a suicide, frequently distorts what sprang from a less "effective" but far more effectual emotion.

But the genuine freshness of her mood is, as a rule, expressed in the ingenious freshness of her style. As a final example of this personal and provocative volume, I quote this memorable portrait:

A LADY

You are beautiful and faded Like an old opera tune Played upon a harpsichord; Or like the sun-flooded silks Of an eighteenth-century boudoir.

In your eyes
Smoulder the fallen roses of outlived
minutes.

And the perfume of your soul
Is vague and suffusing,
With the pungence of sealed spicejars.

Your half-tones delight me, And I grow mad with gazing At your blent colours.

My vigour is a new-minted penny, Which I cast at your feet. Gather it up from the dust, That its sparkle may amuse you.

With her next book, Men, Women and Ghosts (The Macmillan Co., 1916), Miss Lowell fulfilled the hopes of her friends and dashed the gloomy prognostications of her critics. Her antagonists found little comfort in the new volume, for its author escaped from their dark pigeon-holes, shook off the neat labels with which they had ticketed her, and proceeded to do all the things which they had proved she was incapable of doing. They said she could not tell a direct, readable story; and Men, Women and Ghosts is a bookful of them. They said she could write only in irregular rhythms and bizarre images; so she gives them a 627-line eighteenth century love-poem, with all the conservative modeling and technical precision of Pope. They said she was at home only in the limbo of dehumanized, foreign futurism; and here (in "The Overgrown Pasture") are four straightforward, almost over-dramatic poems of everyday New England.

One of the most remarkable things about this volume is its extraordinary range of subjects, treatment and forms. Chaucerian stanzas, "unrelated" vers libre, strict ballad measures, polyphonic prose, regular conservative couplets, free-rhymed verse, monologs in dialect,

stiff little tercets—in her handling of these Miss Lowell reveals her skill as the most versatile woman that has ever written poetry in America. Perhaps, after all, the most amazing thing is neither the amount of topics nor the variety of forms that interest her, but the astonishing success with which they are employed. Restless, penetrative, alert, Miss Lowell's reactions are a fresh surprise to the reader and an impetus to the artist.

Turn to the first section in the new volume. These six "Figurines in Old Saxe" are as artfully fashioned as the fine china that they are supposed to represent; yet the figures are none the less real for being manufactured. The emotions, as in most of Miss Lowell's work, are studied and intellectualized, but somehow they escape being artifice. She speaks rarely of herself, but outside of herself; and, being a skilfully objective artist, she plays every rôle with as much gusto as if it were her natural part. Sometimes the illusion of reality is startling. Look at "Patterns," with its fierce war of restraint and passion set against an eighteenth century background; notice how thoroughly the poet has identified herself with the woman who carried herself rigid to the pattern, but cried out at the end:

In Summer and in Winter I shall walk
Up and down
The patterned garden-paths
In my stiff, brocaded gown.
The squills and daffodils
Will give place to pillared roses, and to
asters, and to snow.
I shall go
Up and down
In my gown.
Gorgeously arrayed,
Boned and stayed.

And the softness of my body will be guarded from embrace
By each button, hook, and lace.
For the man who should loose me is dead,
Fighting with the Duke in Flanders,
In a pattern called a war.
Christ! What are patterns for?

Or, for an even subtler substitution, observe "The Cremona Violin," with its deft use of the Chaucerian verse structure threaded with the flowing line of modern vers libre to simulate the undulating rhythm of the violin. Or, for a further proof that Miss Lowell can be most convincing when she is least obviously herself, turn from the strict stanzas of "Pickthorn Manor" to the uncanny suggestion and ghostly force of "The Cross Roads." Or study what evidently is Miss Lowell's favorite section, "Bronze Tablets," where this frequently agnostic poet may be caught almost in an attitude of hero-worship. Here, through the medium of four poems and a dozen characters, we have a series of side-lights on the last phase of Napoleon, side-lights that are as unusual as they are illuminating. Aside from its metrical excellence, this set rises to an eloquence and ironic force that none of her previous work achieved. The first of this series, "The Fruit Shop," sets the mental as well as the physical scene for the Napoleonic tableaux; "Malmaison" achieves both poignance and that mordant irony that was more than suggested in the previous volume, and in "The Hammers" the series (as well as the book) reaches its dramatic and artistic climax. It is a genuinely thrilling piece of work, emotionally as well as technically; the skill with which it is divided into different moods with their verbal leitmotifs is something more than a tour de force. The way the various kinds of hammers are

characterized and made dominant—their music changing from the ponderous banging at the building of the "Bellerophon" to the light tapping as the letters that spell Napoleon's victories are picked off the arch in the *Place du Carrousel*, to the final hammers drumming on the coffin at St. Helena—the emphasis with which they reveal a person and a period—these are things rare even in the best of contemporary art. No one but Masefield can surpass Miss Lowell when she is telling a narrative.

In this volume, I have said, Miss Lowell's finest quality—her probing irony—reaches its fullest expression. It animates the picture in "1777" where, in a brief glimpse of America and Venice, she contrasts the birth of a new nation with the death of an old one. It turns "Off the Turnpike" into a grotesque reflection of the insanity that broods over lonely farms. And it shines most brilliantly when it achieves so direct an expression of itself as in "The Dinner Party." Here are three of the incisive sections:

FISH

"So . . ." they said,
With their wine-glasses delicately poised,
Mocking at the thing they cannot understand
"So . . ." they said again,
Amused and insolent.
The silver on the table glittered,
And the red wine in the glasses
Seemed the blood I had wasted
In a foolish cause.

GAME

The gentleman with the grey-and-black whiskers Sneered languidly over his quail.

Then my heart flew up and laboured,
And I burst from my own holding
And hurled myself forward.

With straight blows I beat upon him, Furiously, with red-hot anger, I thrust against him. But my weapon slithered over his polished surface, And I recoiled upon myself, Panting.

ELEVEN O'CLOCK

The front door was hard and heavy,
It shut behind me on the house of ghosts.
I flattened my feet on the pavement
To feel it solid under me;
I ran my hand along the railings
And shook them,
And pressed their pointed bars
Into my palms.
The hurt of it reassured me,
And I did it again and again
Until they were bruised.
When I woke in the night
I laughed to find them aching,
For only living flesh can suffer.

Less successful are the post-impressionist records of city scenes. "Red Slippers" does, indeed, achieve the effect of prismatic rays of crimson split into a thousand scintillations. But the rest of the "Towns in Colour" (an attempt to see the city not as a market or a medley of people but as a composition, an aural painting that takes sensations and sounds and breaks them into dominant lines and shades) furnishes little more than an intellectual concept. Like the "Three Pieces for String Quartet," where Miss Lowell takes Stravinsky's musical joke in literal earnest, we have a glimpse here of the experimenter beginning to flounder, of the intellectual swimmer becoming theory-logged. The poet, beyond her depth, strikes for solider ground and the poem sinks in a welter of method and mechanics.

These moments are fortunately rare. And they are still rarer in her latest volume. In Can Grande's Castle (The Macmillan Co., 1918) the teller of stories, the artist and the experimenter are finally fused. Possibly the strangest thing about this energetic book is that it is actually taken from other books. Even the title is borrowed. And yet the use of another poet's phrase explains not only itself, but the volume it prefaces. In Richard Aldington's "At the British Museum" are these lines:

I turn the page and read . . .

The heavy air, the black desks,
The bent heads and the rustling noises
In the great dome
Vanish. . . .
And
The sun hangs in the cobalt-blue sky,
The boat drifts over the lake shallows,
The fishes skim like umber shades through the undulating weeds,
The oleanders drop their rosy petals on the lawns,

And the swallows dive and swirl and whistle
About the cleft battlements of Can Grande's Castle.

By using Aldington's phrase as her title Miss Lowell lets us understand that the contents of the new volume are the result of what she has read. But in the writing, her reading becomes real; her creative excitement makes what she has got from pages of history-books far livelier than her life. It is obvious that she could not possibly have experienced these things. Their vividness is due to the fact that, thrown back into the past, either by the war (as Miss Lowell claims) or, as is more probable,

by a subconscious search for fresh material, an artist has taken a list of dates, battles, proper names together with Rand McNally's Geography and vitalized them. It is this objective and dramatic sense that makes her audience feel the reality of her historical revaluations just as it makes Miss Lowell declare, "Living now in the midst of events greater than these, the stories I have dug out of dusty volumes seem as actual as my own existence."

The volume is composed of four long semi-declamatory, semi-narrative poems, all of them in "polyphonic prose." Concerning this form, Miss Lowell has an extremely interesting digression in her preface, interesting from the speculative as well as the technical side. A glance at these four poems in this manner shows not only how far she has gone from the original innovation of Paul Fort (which consisted, for the greater part, of regular prose passages alternating with regular rhymed ones) but how greatly she has progressed beyond all her own previous efforts in this mode. Now, with its many changes of rhythm and subtleties of rhyme, it is practically a new form; dignified, orchestral, flexible. It is a form of almost infinite possibilities; it can run the gamut of tempi and dynamics on one page; it can combine the thunder of great oratory with the roll of blank verse and the low flutes of a lyric. If Miss Lowell has done nothing else, she has enriched English as well as American literature with a new and variable medium of expression.

The poems in Can Grande's Castle are only four in number, but two of them represent the best that Miss Lowell has given and is capable of giving us. "Hedge Island," the least important of the quartet, is a resetting of the coaching period in England. "Sea-Blue and Blood-Red" is a picturesque, accurate, sometimes too pre-

cise and prolix re-telling (especially in the technical details) of Lord Nelson's great battles. But the other two touch magnificence. "The Bronze Horses" has a larger sweep than Miss Lowell has ever attempted; she achieves here a sense of magnitude and time that is amazing. From the period when the bronze horses witness the return of the rapacious and efficient Romans under Titus from their eminence on the Arch of Nero, to the day when the airships attack Venice and they are taken down from the portico of Saint Mark's to be sent for safety to Rome, one feels the slow circling of years. Not in all contemporary poetry has the quality of balance and return been so beautifully illustrated. And its intellectual content is scarcely less striking, even though Miss Lowell falls into a common error by suggesting that Nietzsche was not only greatly responsible for the world war but was a strong advocate of its "schrecklichkeit."

Yet splendid as "The Bronze Horses" is, it is surpassed by the sheer power of "Guns as Keys: And the Great Gate Swings," the high-water mark of the volume. In this poem Miss Lowell has combined "polyphonic prose" at its best with unrhymed vers libre so skilfully that the most skeptical conservative must see how easily this form lends itself to new and unsuspected musical variations. See, for instance, the way in which this free recital of Commodore Perry's visit to Japan is varied, broken up by snatches of rude chanties and inserts of exotic details as delicate as the prints of Hokusai. The opening indicates the method:

Due East, far West. Distant as the nests of the opposite winds. Removed as fire and water are, as the clouds and the roots of the hills, as the wills of youth and age. Let the key-guns be mounted, make a brave show of waging

war, and pry off the lid of Pandora's box once more. Get in at any cost and let out at little, so it seems; but wait—wait—there is much to follow through the Great Gate!

They do not see things in quite that way, on this bright November day, with sun flashing, and waves splashing, up and down Chesapeake Bay. On shore, all the papers are running to press with huge headlines: "Commodore Perry Sails!" Dining-tables buzz with travellers' tales of old Japan culled from Dutch writers. But we are not like the Dutch. No shutting the stars and stripes up on an island. Pooh! We must trade wherever we have a mind. Naturally!

The wharves of Norfolk are falling behind, becoming smaller, confused with the warehouses and the trees. On the impetus of the strong South breeze, the paddle-wheel steam frigate Mississippi of the United States Navy sails down the flashing bay. Sails away, and steams away, for her furnaces are burning, and her paddle-wheels turning, and all her sails are set and full. Pull, men, to the old chorus:

"A Yankee ship sails down the river, Blow, boys, blow; Her masts and spars they shine like silver, Blow, my bully boys, blow."

But what is the use? That plaguey brass band blares out with "The Star Spangled Banner" and you can not hear the men because of it. Which is a pity, thinks the Commodore, in his cabin, studying the map and marking stepping-stones: Madeira, Cape Town, Mauritius, Singapore, nice firm stepping-places for seven-league boots. Flagstones up and down a hemisphere.

My! How she throws the water off from her bows, and how those paddle-wheels churn her along at the rate of seven good knots! You are a proud lady, Mrs. Mississippi, curtseying down Chesapeake Bay, all a-flutter with red, white and blue ribbons.

At Mishiwa in the Province of Kai, Three men are trying to measure a pine tree By the length of their outstretched arms. Trying to span the bole of a huge pine tree By the spread of their lifted arms. Attempting to compress its girth Within the limit of their extended arms. Beyond, Fuji, Majestic, inevitable, Wreathed over by wisps of cloud. The clouds draw about the mountain. And there are gaps. The men reach about the pine tree, But their hands break apart; The rough bark escapes their hand-clasps; The tree is unencircled. Three men are trying to measure the stem of a gigantic pine tree, With their arms. At Mishiwa in the Province of Kai.

In this poem Miss Lowell has not, as some have charged when the work first appeared in The Seven Arts, indulged in a fling at the old Japanese on one hand or a sneer at America's commercialism on the other. She has simply held up a contrasted picture of two races when they were brought in contact for the first time. "I wanted," she says, "to place in juxtaposition the delicacy and artistic clarity of Japan and the artistic ignorance and gallant self-consciousness of America. Of course, each country must be supposed to have the faults of its virtues; if, therefore, I have also opposed Oriental craft to Occidental bluff, I must beg indulgence." Miss Lowell does not pretend to judge which has gained most by this meeting. In her account of how Perry's "fire-ships" convinced the Japanese and how the guns without firing a

shot blew off the locks from the gates of the East, she is content to be the poet rather than the prophet, although the latter's voice is raised in the calm facts of her postlude and the paragraph near the end:

The sands of centuries run fast, one slides, and another, each falling into a smother of dust.

A locomotive in pay for a Whistler; telegraph wires buying a revolution; weights and measures and Audubon's birds in exchange for fear. Yellow monkey-men leaping out of Pandora's box, shaking the rocks of the Western coastline. Golden California bartering panic for prints. The dressing-gowns of a continent won at the cost of security. Artists and philosophers lost in the hour-glass and pouring through an open Gate.

No account of Miss Lowell's work would be complete without a reference to her uncollected poems—particularly her "Lacquer Prints." These fragments, which at a first glance seem adaptations from Chinese and Japanese originals, are in reality her own conceptions, based on nothing more foreign than an Oriental influence; they owe to Li-Po and the hokku only what the paintings of Whistler owe to ukiyo-ye and the compositions of Hiroshige and Utamaro. In their sensitivity and atmospheric color they are another proof of Miss Lowell's zeal as experimenter. Even her more direct love songs have gained by this epigrammatic terseness and brevity of line. Witness this excellently turned

A DECADE

When you came, you were like red wine and honey, And the taste of you burnt my mouth with its sweetness. Now you are like morning bread— Smooth and pleasant. I hardly taste you at all, for I know your savour; But I am completely nourished.

It is plain that Miss Lowell's range is the most obvious of her gifts. But it is not the greatest; she strikes single notes as sharply as she can sound large, experimental chords. When her collected works are some day appraised in a complete study of American poetry, it will be found that her vigor, matching her versatility, will have expressed the poet that is half-singer, half-scientist, and the groping, experimental period she helped represent.

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EDGAR LEE MASTERS

WHEN Spoon River Anthology appeared in 1915 (The Macmillan Co.) a new and vital personality was revealed to the American reader. And if Edgar Lee Masters had written nothing but this arresting volume, he would have remained the most arresting and vigorous figure in contemporary poetry. As it is, Spoon River Anthology will, by virtue of its extraordinary power and originality, preserve its author's name long after his earlier and subsequent works are forgotten. Before his chief work. Masters wrote over four hundred poems and published four books of verse, one of them as early as 1898 and two of them under pseudonyms. They were principally the usual thing in rhyme and regular meters verses born of the desire to write rather than the imperative need for expression—honest attempts, workmanlike, literary, undistinguished. Fragments of Shelley mingled with scraps from Browning and distorted echoes of Shakespeare. A passage from Maximilian (published by Richard G. Badger in 1902) is typical:

"No more!
Oh, tragic news! I thank thee, God in heaven,
Who set my sweet Carlotta's spirit free.
No more! then never more to struggle here,
Like some bright planet buffeted with clouds.
One tie the less to bind me to the world.
No more! no more! I cannot deem her dead—
She lives, for me as ever."

No one would have suspected from such efforts that Masters was, at heart, a passionate and uncompromising recorder of life. Yet there was nothing weak or evasive about the man; and his nine years of association with the radical Clarence Darrow as his partner, furnished him with a broad equipment for his living literature. One might divide Masters' development into three more or less definite stages: the plagiarist, the realist, the mysticist. The line of division between the second and third (even in Spoon River Anthology) is not always pronounced; but the break between the first and second is as sharp as it was sudden.

Up to 1913, Masters had been writing the amaranthineasphodel type of poetry that is common to every poet and belongs to none of them. Then something happened. Miss Harriet Monroe had founded Poetry in 1911; and that intransigent little monthly, dedicating most of its pages to new and frankly experimental tendencies in contemporary verse, had introduced and helped create an audience for many writers, including Tagore, Lindsay, Pound and Sandburg. It was (according to its editor) the reading of much of the free verse appearing in this magazine, especially that of Sandburg, that shook Masters out of his literary rut and spurred him to a more outspoken radicalism. It is said that even before this, William Marion Reedy had advised him to discard his thrice-told romances and turn to the living world about him. As early as 1909, Reedy had spoken to him of the raciness of all great literature and, in furtherance of his theory, had pressed a copy of the Greek Anthology upon him. The terse style of these epitaphs made a deep impression upon Masters and "Hod Putt." "Serepta the Scold," "Amanda Barker" and

"The Unknown"—the first written and first printed sketches of Spoon River Anthology—appeared in Reedy's Mirror, May 29, 1914. Through this friendship with Reedy and Sandburg, Masters found his native power and, discarding the old formulae of an alien beauty, he turned to Southern Illinois for his poetic substance and subjects.

The thing that is most apparent in Spoon River Anthology is the brusque method of the author; the poems owe much of their peculiar brilliance to their brevity. Antagonistic critics have seized upon this feature as though it were a defect. They called it "reportorial," "crudely sensational," a species of "poetic yellow journalism." Even one of our most discerning appraisers found that "in the febrile newspaper report of the murder trial and in Mr. Masters' Anthology there is an undoubted affinity." "Spoon River," continued Mr. O. W. Firkins, "was little more than a series of headlines articulated with unusual skill." And more recently, a typical Times editorial spoke of "the specious novelty that gave Spoon River Anthology its first appeal. "But." it concluded reassuringly, "one hears little now of this strange mixture of prose and free verse."

Dirt, darkness, disillusion; an insistence on looking at what is morbid and perverted, a preoccupation with sex and suicide, a moral obliquity—these were a few of the literary crimes charged against the author when his detractors wearied of attacking the technique and form of his work. What they failed to see was that the evidence of decay in his people was not a perversion of Mr. Masters but a true version of the gradual dissolution of so many communities that wither and are forgotten. Whether it be Bernadotte or Havana, Illinois, or any

mid-Western or New England village that has gone to seed, the background is essentially that of a tawdry clutter of houses and hotels, a few reminders of a once prosperous past, a mill that has closed down. "'All is changed save the river and the hill.' That is the secret of Spoon River," said the New York Tribune, "and it is as the record of a failure, of an American community passed over and with its face turned to the past, that the book is to be judged."

But the book must be judged as something much more than this. It must be given a place of undisputed importance, first, for the veracity of Mr. Masters' report; second, for the poetry in which he has framed it. As a document, it is by turns arresting, stimulating, irritating.

There are times when the author has revealed much of America in microcosm. And there are other times when he seems to have seen his environment through a haze of disillusion, a fog that distorts people and perspectives; times when he has not reached far enough beneath the surface dramas of the characters, when he seems to mistake the grocery-store gossip, the sewing-circle scandal for the foundation and superstructure of the whole village. And yet there are scores of instances where Masters has been absolutely faithful to his own dramatis personae; for the major part, his fidelity is far greater than nine-tenths of his contemporaries. Masters sees his little township as a cross-section of a typical small (in mind as well as in area) mid-Western city. And in it he uncovers the conflict of purpose and passion, its hates and sacrifices and jealousies, its callousness, its smugness, hypocrisies and frustrated dreams. Some one has said that Masters' Spoon River cemetery has more action than Forty Second Street and Broadway; there is no doubt that his dead people are more truly alive than the living characters of most of our American novelists.

This is the prolog with which the volume opens:

THE HILL

Where are Elmer, Herman, Bert, Tom and Charley, The weak of will, the strong of arm, the clown, the boozer, the fighter?

All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

One passed in a fever,
One was burned in a mine,
One was killed in a brawl,
One died in a jail,
One fell from a bridge toiling for children and wife—
All, all are sleeping, sleeping, on the hill.

Where are Ella, Kate, Mag, Lizzie and Edith,
The tender heart, the simple soul, the loud, the proud,
the happy one?—
All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

One died in shameful child-birth,
One of a thwarted love,
One at the hands of a brute in a brothel,
One of a broken pride, in the search for heart's desire,
One after life in far-away London and Paris
Was brought to her little space by Ella and Kate and
Mag—

All, all, are sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

Where are Uncle Isaac and Aunt Emily, And old Towny Kincaid and Sevigne Houghton, And Major Walker who had talked With venerable men of the revolution?— All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

They brought them dead sons from the war, And daughters whom life had crushed, And their children fatherless, crying— All, all, are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

Where is Old Fiddler Jones
Who played with life all his ninety years,
Braving the sleet with bared breast,
Drinking, rioting, thinking neither of wife nor kin,
Nor gold, nor love, nor heaven?
Lo! he babbles of the fish-frys of long ago,
Of the horse-races of long ago at Clary's Grove,
Of what Abe Lincoln said
One time at Springfield.

And on the following page we have the first of the dead spirits speaking from his grave.

HOD PUTT

Here I lie close to the grave
Of Old Bill Piersol,
Who grew rich trading with the Indians, and who
Afterwards took the bankrupt law
And emerged from it richer than ever.
Myself grown tired of toil and poverty
And beholding how Old Bill and others grew in wealth,
Robbed a traveler one night near Proctor's Grove,
Killing him unwittingly while doing so,
For the which I was tried and hanged.
That was may way of going into bankruptcy.
Now we who took the bankrupt law in our respective
ways
Sleep peacefully side by side.

A few pages further on we have the splendid duplicate pictures "Benjamin Pantier" and "Mrs. Benjamin Pantier"—a reminiscence of the old-fashioned sentimental frames for two pictures—with a difference.

Edgar Lee Masters

BENJAMIN PANTIER

Together in this grave lie Benjamin Pantier, attorney at law,

And Nig, his dog, constant companion, solace and friend.

Down the gray road, friends, children, men and women, Passing one by one out of life, left me till I was alone With Nig for partner, bed-fellow, comrade in drink. In the morning of life I knew aspiration and saw glory. Then she, who survives me, snared my soul With a snare which bled me to death, Till I, once strong of will, lay broken, indifferent, Living with Nig in a room back of a dingy office. Under my jaw-bone is snuggled the bony nose of Nig—Our story is lost in silence. Go by, mad world!

MRS. BENJAMIN PANTIER

I know that he told that I snared his soul With a snare which bled him to death. And all the men loved him, And most of the women pitied him. But suppose you are really a lady, and have

But suppose you are really a lady, and have delicate tastes,

And loathe the smell of whiskey and onions.

And the rhythm of Wordsworth's "Ode" runs in your ears.

While he goes about from morning till night Repeating bits of that common thing; "Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?" And then, suppose,

You are a woman well endowed,
And the only man with whom the law and morality
Permit you to have the marital relation
Is the very man that fills you with disgust
Every time you think of it—while you think of it
Every time you see him?
That's why I drove him away from home
To live with his dog in a dingy room
Back of his office.

Mr. Masters is fond of these ironic contrasts. He delights in displaying both sides of the medal—particularly when one side is badly mutilated. He seems to take a grim satisfaction whenever the accepted romantic element is destroyed by a sharp reversal of, let us say, form. Such an effective coupling lends an added poignance to the sardonic tragedies in

ALBERT SCHIRDING

Jonas Keene thought his lot a hard one Because his children were all failures. But I know of a fate more trying than that: It is to be a failure while your children are successes. For I raised a brood of eagles Who flew away at last, leaving me A crow on the abandoned bough. Then, with the ambition to prefix Honorable to my name, And thus to win my children's admiration, I ran for County Superintendent of Schools. Spending my accumulations to win—and lost. That fall my daughter received first prize in Paris For her picture, entitled, "The Old Mill"-(It was of the water mill before Henry Wilkin put in steam.) The feeling that I was not worthy of her finished me.

JONAS KEENE

Why did Albert Schirding kill himself
Trying to be County Superintendent of Schools,
Blest as he was with the means of life
And wonderful children, bringing him honor
Ere he was sixty?
If even one of my boys could have run a news-stand,
Or one of my girls could have married a decent man,
I should not have walked in the rain
And jumped into bed with clothes all wet,
Refusing medical aid.

In all of these excerpts, it is easy to see where the element of poetry has strengthened and vitalized the conception. More than half of their power would have vanished had these portraits been printed as prose paragraphs. Observe this last one in that form:

Why did Albert Schirding kill himself trying to be County Superintendent of Schools, blest as he was with the means of life and wonderful children, bringing him honor ere he was sixty? If even one of my boys could have run a news-stand, or one of my girls could have married a decent man, I should not have walked in the rain and jumped into bed with clothes all wet, refusing medical aid.

Aside from all technical considerations, it will be seen at once that Masters' original manner of presentation was not merely an effective but the only logical one. As prose, "Jonas Keene" is nothing but a rather dull statement. As poetry, it justifies itself—not only because it sharpens the lines to the reader but because it sharpened them for Mr. Masters. The mere shaping of such lines was a continual restraining process, forcing the author to make a few pungent sentences out of what would have grown prolix in prose. And the divisions of these lines was similarly of benefit to the reader. They arrested the eye; they marked out, with dramatic effect, the sudden turn for the mind; they supplied a certain music to an often unmusical setting.

The volume itself may be roughly divided into three rather well-defined groups. In the first of these we have the power of plain statement, usually heightened by a matter-of-fact humor; the second and largest division has disillusion as its motive; the third lifts both statement and disillusion to a plane of exaltation. Nothing could

be more indicative of the mood of the first group than "Roscoe Purkapile," "Mrs. Purkapile," "Russian Sonia," "Barney Hainsfeather," "Penniwit, the Artist," "Roger Heston." The impulse of the second class dominates the book; its most impressive and remarkable turns may be seen in "Indignation Jones," "Margaret Fuller Slack," "George Trimble," "Amos Sibley," "Editor Whedon," "Walter Simmons," "Bert Kessler," "Enoch Dunlap" (the bitterest denunciation in the collection), the caustic "Daisy Fraser," the mock-epic "The Spooniad," and "Harry Wilmans," that rises to a brutal, impassioned outcry. I quote the last.

HARRY WILMANS

I was just turned twenty-one,
And Henry Phipps, the Sunday-school superintendent,
Made a speech in Bindle's Opera House.
"The honor of the flag must be upheld," he said,
"Whether it be assailed by a barbarous tribe of Tagalogs
Or the greatest power in Europe."
And we cheered and cheered the speech and the flag he
waved

As he spoke.

And I went to the war in spite of my father,
And followed the flag till I saw it raised
By our camp in a rice field near Manila,
And all of us cheered and cheered it.
But there were flies and poisonous things
And there was the deadly water,
And the cruel heat,
And the sickening, putrid food;
And the smell of the trench just back of the tents
Where the soldiers went to empty themselves;
And there were the whores who followed us, full of syphilis;
And beastly acts between ourselves or alone.

With bullying, hatred, degradation among us, And days of loathing and nights of fear To the hour of the charge through the steaming swamp, Following the flag, Till I fell with a scream, shot through the guts. Now there's a flag over me in Spoon River! A flag! A flag!

The third group, an eloquent contradiction to those detractors who granted Masters nothing but a crude and static irony, contains some of the most condensed pieces of poignance that contemporary literature offers. For sheer tenderness one will find few things more touching than "Doc Hill" and "Emily Sparks"; for restrained pathos one cannot turn to many short poems more noble than "Washington McNeely," "Hare Drummer" or "Pauline Barrett." Sometimes this mood is merged with a challenging defiance; passion for a truth too long repressed surges out of "Shack Dye," "Griffy, the Cooper" and, in a starker voice, from

CARL HAMBLIN

The press of the Spoon River Clarion was wrecked, And I was tarred and feathered, For publishing this on the day the Anarchists were hanged in Chicago:

"I saw a beautiful woman with bandaged eyes Standing on the steps of a marble temple. Great multitudes passed in front of her, Lifting their faces to her imploringly. In her left hand she held a sword. She was brandishing the sword, Sometimes striking a child, again a laborer, Again a slinking woman, again a lunatic. In her right hand she held a scale;

Into the scale pieces of gold were tossed By those who dodged the strokes of the sword. A man in a black gown read from a manuscript: 'She is no respecter of persons.' Then a youth wearing a red cap Leaped to her side and snatched away the bandage. And lo, the lashes had been eaten away From the oozy eye-lids; The eye-balls were seared with a milky mucus; The madness of a dying soul Was written on her face—But the multitude saw why she wore the bandage."

And, though the note of definite affirmation is far from a dominant one in this volume, there are moments when the exaltation culminates in a *crescendo* of exulting like

LUCINDA MATLOCK

I went to the dances at Chandlerville, And played snap-out at Winchester. One time we changed partners, Driving home in the moonlight of middle June, And then I found Davis. We were married and lived together for seventy years, Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children, Eight of whom we lost Ere I had reached the age of sixty. I spun, I wove, I kept the house, I nursed the sick. I made the garden, and for holiday Rambled over the fields where sang the larks, And by Spoon River gathering many a shell, And many a flower and medicinal weed— Shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green valleys.

At ninety-six I had lived enough, that is all, And passed to a sweet repose. What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness, Anger, discontent and drooping hopes? Degenerate sons and daughters, Life is too strong for you—
It takes life to love life.

It is an almost tragic thing to leave these epic heights and turn to Masters' succeeding three volumes. Except for occasional flashes, they do not seem to be the work The ensuing trio are an elaborate of the same man. return to his first heavily rhetorical style; they make the Spoon River volume seem something of an inexplicable In that one extended burst, Masters accomplished greatness; he wrote not only a powerful book but a popular one. Its unprecedented success must have startled Masters as much as it did his critics. At any rate. it seemed to give him an unholy respect for himself, a respect touched with a bit of awe. Evidently impressed by the least vital thing in Spoon River: its philosophizing, Masters blossomed forth as a thinker, a late discoverer of scientific platitudes, a babbling oracle. Monolog after tiresome monolog issued from him; he began to give erudite explanations of the metrical construction of his essentially casual lines; he came to distrust those critics who hailed his work as anything less than a Comédie Humaine. In short, he began to take both himself and his art with a pontifical seriousness. Turn to the three subsequent volumes. The mantle of a pedagogic prophet is put on in Songs and Satires; in The Great Valley, a jumbled scientific learning sits heavily on the poet; in Toward the Gulf, he sinks beneath it.

Examine Songs and Satires (The Macmillan Co., 1916). The indulgent reader will forgive the inclusion of such early and obviously resurrected trifles as "Rain in My Heart," "When Under the Icy Eaves," "What

You Will" and similar flat sentimentalities. One passes these hurriedly for the sake of the fire that was left over, for the few strong and searching poems like "In the Cage," "Arabel" and the sonorous majesty of "Silence," that begins:

I have known the silence of the stars and of the sea
And the silence of the city when it pauses,
And the silence of a man and a maid,
And the silence for which music alone finds the word,
And the silence of the woods before the winds of spring
begin,

And the silence of the sick
When their eyes roam about the room.
And I ask: For the depths
Of what use is language?
A beast of the field moans a few times
When death takes its young:
And we are voiceless in the presence of realities—
We cannot speak.

But what is more distressing than the large amount of juvenile prettiness is the verbosity of the better pieces. Masters begins to run on alarmingly. The laconic pioneer has developed into a self-conscious and all too-loquacious mystic. "So We Grew Together" is a weakening of the least of the historic epitaphs, lengthened to two hundred and fifty lines; "The Loop" is a hundred-line list, a small part of which runs:

And now the rows of windows showing laces, Silks, draperies and furs and costly vases, Watches and mirrors, silver cups and mugs, Emeralds, diamonds, Indian, Persian rugs, Hats, velvets, silver buckles, ostrich-plumes, Drugs, violet water, powder and perfumes. Here is a monstrous winking eye, beneath A showcase by an entrance full of teeth.

Here rubber coats, umbrellas, mackintoshes, Hoods, rubber boots and arctics and galoshes. Here is half a block of overcoats, Then windows of fine linen, snakewood canes, Scarfs, opera hats, in use where fashion reigns.

This, it can be seen, is scarcely a poem at all; it is a pocket-guide, an uninteresting advertisement, a rhymed version of Sears, Roebuck's fall catalog. And it is still harder to excuse the sixteen pages of two poor Arthurian ballads when, in the same book, one is confronted with six crowded sheets of bad balladry like "St. Francis and Lady Clare" that ends:

Antonio cursed St. Clare in rhyme
And took to wine and got the lime
Of hatred on his soul, in time
Grew healed though left a little lame,
And laughed about it in his prime;
When he could see with crystal eyes
That love is a winged thing which flies;
Some break the wings, some let them rise
From earth like God's dove to the skies
Diffused in heavenly flame.

Even the racy politics of Bryan's movements in "The Cocked Hat" cannot save this volume from its flabby desuetude:

The faults are intensified in *The Great Valley*, published the same year (The Macmillan Co., 1916). And where *Songs and Satires* suffered principally from incoherence, this tome crumbles beneath an even greater weight of words. Masters, in this collection, begins to grow more bookish, more studiously oracular. What seems to be a new interest (or an old interest that has found courage to declare itself) in modern scientific and

creative writing, has provoked a mass of writing from Masters which is neither scientific nor creative. What makes so much of *The Great Valley* such unstimulating reading is that Masters himself has evidently read so much. Going through the volume is like going through a large and curiously assorted library, a library somewhat musty, formidable and haphazardly arranged—where the works of Dr. Sigmund Freud are found between lectures by John Cowper Powys and *Gems from the Poets*. Only too much preoccupation with books could give that blinking and pseudo-scientific air that persists in his later work. With its echoes of Darwin and Gobineau, all it lacks is the usual fantastic jumble of statistics, speculations and data of skull sutures, cephalic indices, etc.

This effort to plumb the depths of social evolution in poetry is fatal; it turns such a poem as "To a Spirochaeta" into a humorless parody of itself; it reduces "My Dog Ponto" to stodgy statement and philosophic puerility; it makes "The Furies" a piece of mystical bombast; it hardens the dry facts of "Autocthon" in even dryer language. It is not that Masters is too fond of his facts (as some of his critics have suggested); he is not fond enough of them. He does not care so much for the thing itself as for the thought it suggests—and that thought touches something in Masters that is, in its way, as archaic and didactic as the tone of the despised Victorians and as mystico-moralizing as the most ministerial of the New England group.

Technically, the falling-off is equally great. His attempts at long-winded flights rumble noisily but seldom ascend. The number of themes is amazing, but they are used with surprisingly little variety and his own

native utterance is almost entirely lacking. One sometimes hears the voice of Edgar Lee Masters, but it is scarcely recognizable among the confusing echoes of Browning, Darwin, Stephen Phillips and Alfred Tennyson. It is impossible to believe that the man who wrote "Washington McNeely" could ever write (and, what is worse, would print) such jargon as "The Tavern," "Bombyx" and "The Furies," or such poor, antiquated echoes as "Apollo at Pherae" and "Marsyas." Incredible as it seems, the latter actually begins:

Pallas Athena, in an hour of ease
From guarding states and succoring the wise,
Pressed wistfully her lips against a flute
Made by a Phrygian youth from resonant wood
Cut near Sangerius. Upon a bank
Made sweet by daises and anemone
She sat with godly wisdom exercised
Blowing her breath against the stubborn tube
That it might answer and vibrate in song.

So in the most recent volume, Toward the Gulf (The Macmillan Co., 1918), we find the same jumble accented and intensified. The result of Masters' reading becomes painfully apparent; he seems to have swallowed volumes, theories, schools, creeds and ideas without assimilating them. We begin to suspect that what was sometimes charged against Spoon River may be true of Masters—that he has a power of analysis but no gift for synthesis. Masters' mind seems cluttered with ideas and it is the clutter that strikes one most forcibly. The three books show a confusion of many things, a clear vision of but few. Instead of poignance flashed in a dozen words or characters set off in a dozen lines, we have (in Toward the Gulf) eight pages of "Botanical Gardens," twenty

pages of wearisome narrative mixed with scraps of Mendelism (as in "Dr. Scudder's Clinical Lecture"), interminable histories like "Excluded Middle," where all the familiar truths of heredity and sex are paraded at length with a great show of discovery;—the platitudinous in terms of the pathological. The contents reveal how a legal mind may mistake evidence for truth—to say nothing of beauty. Even analytical poetry suffers when it seems nothing so much as metrical arrangements of reports from the Journal of Abnormal Psychology.

. . . But turn to the less personal poems. The opening title-poem of the volume begins:

From the Cordilleran Highlands, From the Height of Land Far north. From the Lake of the Woods. From Rainy Lake, From Itasca's springs. From the snow and the ice Of the mountains. Breathed on by the sun, And given life, Awakened by kisses of fire, Moving, gliding as brightest hyaline Down the cliffs. Down the hills. Over the stones. Trickling as rills . . .

and so on, proceeding in this vein for nearly two hundred lines. This is scarcely credible. And yet the most amazing exhibit in the volume is the poem "Delilah" that starts off:

> Because thou wast most delicate, A woman fair for men to see,

The earth did compass thy estate, Thou didst hold life and death in fee, And every soul did bend the knee.

Much pleasure also made thee grieve
For that the goblet had been drained.
The well spiced viand thou didst leave
To frown on want whose throat was strained,
And violence whose hands were stained....

There are forty such verses with a side-line "argument." verses that read like a weak, posthumous poem by Swinburne touched up by George Sylvester Viereck! There are, of course, few things in the volume as feeble and foolish as this. There are, moreover, three poems which, though unimportant as poetry, are notable as studies in character and satire. They are "The World Saver" (a forceful portrait of "Thomas Paine" and a bitter arraignment of America's neglect of one of our most passionate liberators); "Bertrand and Gourgaud Talk over Old Times" (a reminiscence of Napoleon, pictured as the great democrat, betrayed and broken by autocratic England because of his dream of democracy); and "Front the Ages with a Smile" (a more direct and scornful showing-up of hypocrisy and complacence, revealed in the hatred of Voltaire). These make a compelling trio. There are also several fine phrases in "To-morrow is My Birthday," but this frankly sexual interpretation of Shakespeare would be more impressive if Frank Harris had not done the thing far better in prose and if Edwin Arlington Robinson (in "Ben Jonson Entertains a Man from Stratford") had not completely overshadowed it in poetry. This fragment strikes the kev:

Now you see that I
Have not grown from a central dream, but grown
Despite a wound, and over the wound, and used
My flesh to heal my flesh. My love's a fever
Which longed for that which nursed the malady,
And fed on that which still preserved the ill,
The uncertain, sickly appetite to please.
My reason, the physician to my love,
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
Has left me.

It is interesting to observe, in this connection, that all of Masters' successful characterizations belong to the male sex. His women never really live; they are types at best, bloodless embodiments of abstract passions.

Meanwhile, what has become of the simple recorder of Doc Hill and Minerva Jones? What has happened to the poet who caught us with the power of his keen and clipped accents, stripping the verbiage from an overornate poetry? His fearlessness was inspiring; the stark beauty of his great work indubitable, its vigor swept aside prejudice and precedents. Disillusioned yet visionary: a harsh insistence on the sordid ugliness of reality clashing with a determined idealism: the swift irony, the searching cynicism, the satirical sympathywhat became of these? Briefly, a return to type. Inflated rhapsodies that almost turn to rant; an intellectual pitch that expresses itself in a mood that is high-flown instead of high. This strain was even foreshadowed in Spoon River in the pieces so pointedly entitled "Isaiah Beethoven" and "Elijah Browning." And the most characteristic gift of Masters—his direct and cleancut speech? It has, except for odd moments, gone back into the old rumble and rhetoric from which he once reacted so strongly. In "Victor Rafolski on Art," the

accused butler on the witness-stand speaks such a bad Shakespeare-Browning patois as:

You dull Goliaths clothed in coats of blue, Strained and half bursted by the swell of flesh, Topped by Gorilla-heads. You Marmoset, Trained Scoundrel, taught to question and ensnare, I hate you, hate your laws and hate your courts.

And in "Dialogue at Perko's," a Chicago prostitute speaks to her lover in such orotund language:

I'm going to economize my life
By freeing it of systems which grow rich
By using me, and for the privilege
Bestow these gaudy clothes and perfumed bed.

Rhetoric runs amuck in Masters' most recent collection, even to the extent of brandishing so weirdly-fashioned a word as "irregardless." . . .

In short, the latest three volumes present the spectacle of the débâcle of a bard caught in the tangle of many philosophies. It is possible that they mark the rapid descent of a poet and the gradual rise of a writer of painfully analytic and sometimes painfully dull short stories. Possibly, on the other hand, something as strange and pioneering as his one great work may come out of his growing mysticism. A new revelation may result suddenly. But this is an irrelevant and altogether personal speculation. Meanwhile, there is always that landmark, the Spoon River Anthology.

ARTURO GIOVANNITTI

Nothing is a clearer proof of the rich variety and polyphonic character of contemporary American poetry than the work of Arturo Giovannitti. He echoes the hopes and hatreds of the workers as authentically as Masters dealt with the despairs of his villagers and Amy Lowell voiced the experimental desires of those who were "above the conflict." In his stark and barbaric hymns of labor we hear a note that is, for all its international significance, definitely national. And yet it is a note that has been little heard in American poetry. It it strange that this theme should have been expressed with such force and authority by one who was almost a stranger to the English language. Yet even as a child in Italy, Giovannitti had dreamed of America and had "learned upon the knees of his mother and father to reverence, with tears in his eyes, the name of the republic."

This is not the place for an analysis of Giovannitti's political views or his economic theories. But they must be considered, no matter how sketchily, since they form not only the background but the impetus of his poetry. The old clash between employer and employed, the tragic and ridiculous enmity between labor and capital, the terrible hypocrisy of "law and order" in many of our mining camps, the absurd fiction of free speech maintained by a "kept" press—these are matters which con-

cern the man so deeply that they have forced the poet to speak and, so speaking, to violate the aesthetic canons: to write verse which has something to "teach" and which, in spite of this, is poetry. I have said that the class-war, with its agonies of brutality and injustice, is his background; it would have been truer to say it is his battle-ground.

When Giovannitti came here in 1900 at the age of seventeen, with the dream of America as the great liberator in his heart, he was disillusioned and disheartened. What he first saw, through the eyes of the laborer, was the whiplash and legal trickery of the possessing classes; the few ruling the many; a vast conglomeration of helots driven by half a dozen masters. He worked for a time in the Pennsylvania coal mines, sharing the disappointment of many who had come to this country, urged by the promise of liberty and equality that had drawn him here. After the body had been almost crushed, the brain asserted itself. Giovannitti's first impulse was to preach; his passion for democracy was a religion with him. attended a theological school or two. But the formalism of prescribed thinking repelled him. In 1906, he joined the Socialist movement, not only because he believed in the power of its protest but in its constructive program. Later he became the editor of the Italian radical paper, Il Proletario. Always he was being driven on by the vision of a united humanity, a fraternal solidarity not only of the laborers but of all who rendered service. The only things he hated were degradation, theft, chicanery; the only men he fought were the complacent hypocrites, the smug reactionaries who contributed nothing to the world but their sense of superiority. For his connection with the great strike in Lawrence. Massachusetts, he spent several months in jail on a false charge. He opposed tyranny at home and abroad with an intensity unparalleled by any of our writers; all he has written, whether in the form of pamphlets or poems, has been done in "an effort to express a multitude of men lost in an immensity of silence."

All of this is evident on the first page of Giovannitti's Arrows in the Gale (Hillacre Bookhouse, Riverside, Connecticut, 1914) and Helen Keller's eloquent introduction gives it additional emphasis. She enters with illuminating detail into the purposes of the "discontents" and their challenging idealism; she traces the growth of Giovannitti's relations with the Syndicalists. But it is her praise of the poet that is most revealing. Toward the end she writes, "He makes us feel the presence of toilers hidden behind tenement walls, behind the machinery they guide. He turns the full light of his intense, vivid intelligence upon the worn faces of the workers who put every breath and nerve into the struggle for existence, who give every hour and exhaust every faculty that others may live. He finds voice for his message in the sighs, the dumb loves and hopes, the agonies and thwartings of men who are bowed and broken by the monster hands of machines. . . . He welcomes the combat—not a combat that shall rend the world apart, but one which shall bring it together in an universal sunshine of peace." That this is something more than enthusiastic rhapsody may be proved by the most casual glimpse through the volume. Glance at "The Cage," with its rough music and its rougher mixture of terror and jubilance. No poem of our generation is more honest, more heart-rending. Here are two sections from it:

- In the middle of the great greenish room stood the green iron cage.
- All was old, and cold and mournful, ancient with the double antiquity of heart and brain in the great greenish room.
- Old and hoary was the man who sat upon the faldstool, upon the fireless and godless altar,
- Old were the tomes that mouldered behind him on the dusty shelves,
- Old was the painting of an old man that hung above him; Old the man upon his left who awoke with his cracked voice the dead echoes of dead centuries, old the man upon his right who wielded a wand; and old all those who spoke to him and listened to him before and around the green iron cage.
- Old were the words they spoke and their faces were drawn and white and lifeless, without expression or solemnity; like the ikons of old cathedrals.
- For of naught they knew, but of what was written in the old, yellow books. And all the joys and the pains and the loves and hatreds and furies and labors and strifes of man, all the fierce and divine passions that battle and rage in the heart of man, never entered into the great greenish room but to sit in the green iron cage.
- Senility, dullness and dissolution were all around the green iron cage, and nothing was new and young and alive in the great room, except the three men who were in the cage. . . .

But one of the men in the cage, whose soul was tormented by the fiercest fire of hell, which is the yearning after the Supreme Truth, spoke and said unto his comrades:

"Aye, brothers, all things die and pass away, yet nothing is truly and forever dead until each one of the living has thrown a regretless handful of soil into its grave.

Arturo Giovannitti

- "Many a book has been written since these old books were written, and many a proverb of the sage has become the jest of the fool, yet this cage still stands as it stood for numberless ages.
- "What is it, then, that made it of metal more enduring than the printed word?
- "Which is its power to hold us here?
- "Brothers, it is the things we yearn for that subdue us.
- "Brothers, it is the things we yearn for that subdue us.
- "Brothers, it is not hatred for the things that are, but love for things that are to be that make us slaves.
- "And what man is more apt to become a thrall, brothers, and to be locked in a green iron cage, than he who yearns the most for the Supreme of the things that are to be—he who most craves for Freedom?
- "And what subtle and malignant power, save this love of loves, could be in the metal of this cage that it is so mad to emprison us?"
- So spoke one of the men to the other two, and then, out of the silence of the aeons, spoke into his tormented soul the metallic soul of the cage:
- "Iron, the twin brother of fire, the firstborn out of the matrix of the earth, the witness everlasting to the glory of thy labor am I, O Man!
- "Nor for this was I meant, O Man! Not to emprison thee, but to set thee free and sustain thee in thy strife and in thy toil.
- "I was to lift the pillars of the Temple higher than the mountains:
- "I was to break down and bore through all the barriers of the world to open the way to thy triumphant chariot.
- "All the treasures and all the bounties of the earth was I to give as an offering into thy hands, and all its forces and powers to bring chained like crouching dogs at thy feet.

- "Hadst thou not sinned against the nobility of my nature and my destiny, hadst thou not humiliated me, an almighty warrior, to become the lackey of gold, I would have never risen against thee and enslaved thee, O Man!
- "While I was hoe and ploughshare and sword and axe and scythe and hammer, I was the first artificer of thy happiness; but the day I was beaten into the first lock and the first key, I became fetters and chains to thy hands and thy feet, O Man!

"My curse is thy curse, O Man, and even if thou shouldst pass out of the wicket of this cage, never shalt thou be free until thou returnest me to the joy of labor.

"O Man, bring me back into the old smithy, purify me again with the holy fire of the forge, lay me again on the mother breast of the anvil, beat me again with the old honest hammer.—O Man, remould me with thy wonderful hands into an instrument of thy toil,

Remake of me the sword of thy justice,
Remake of me the tripod of thy worship,
Remake of me the sickle for thy grain,
Remake of me the oven for thy bread,
And the andirons for thy peaceful hearth, O
Man!

And the trestles for the bed of thy love, O Man! And the frame of thy joyous lyre, O Man!"

Thus spake to one of the three men, out of the silence of centuries, the metallic soul of the cage.

And he listened unto its voice, and while it was still ringing in his soul—which was tormented by the fiercest fire of hell, which is the yearning after the supreme truth (Is it Death? Is it Love?)—there arose one man in the silent assembly of old men that were around the iron cage.

And that man was the most hoary of all, and most bent and worn and crushed was he under the heavy weight of the great burden he bore without pride and without joy.

He arose and addressing himself—I know not whether to the old man that sat on the black throne, or to the old books that were mouldering behind him, or to the picture that hung above him—he said (and dreary as a wind that moans through the crosses of an old graveyard was his voice):

"I will prove to you that these three men in the cage are criminals and murderers and that they ought to be

put to death."

Love, it was then that I heard for the first time the creak of the moth that was eating the old painting and the old books, and the worm that was gnawing the old bench, and it was then that I saw that all the old men around the great greenish room were dead.

They were dead like the old man in the painting, save that they still read the old books he could read no more, and still spoke and heard the old words he could speak and hear no more, and still passed the judgment of the dead, which he no more could pass, upon the mighty life of the world outside that throbbed and thundered and clamored and roared the wonderful anthem of human labor to the fatherly justice of the Sun.

It will be seen at once by those interested in the mere technique of verse, how admirably Giovannitti's lines shape themselves to his subjects. Utterly unlike Whitman's in structure (and Whitman's influence on Giovannitti is strangely small), they share the same freedom of gesture, the same uplifted kind of realism. Sometimes, with all their fierce sincerity, they grow too strepitant and didactic, as in "Samnite Cradle-Song" and "Utopia," which fizzle out in a rhetorical anti-climax. But these lapses are infrequent; in this volume the heights are not only attained, they are maintained. Giovannitti's intensity rarely descends to what is factitious or glib; it strengthens the vivid and elemental stuff in

"The Last Nickel," "The Sermon on the Common,"
"The Praise of Spring." This is the angry opening of the last-named:

I have hated thee, O Spring.

With all the furies of my inextinguishable blood; with all the ashes of my unappeasable flesh

I have hated thee, And despised thee,

And cursed thee, O Spring.

I have hated thee for the stupidity of thy flowers that smelled the carrion of the covered graves,

For the acquiescent foolishness of thy ever nodding trees,

For the frigid chastity of thy skies,

For the garrulity of thy silly cackling waters And for the petulance of thy eternal reappearing,

O thou idiotic, unoriginal repentance of the decrepit earth.

I have hated thee because thou wert an atonement, not a rebellion; thou wert a returning childhood, not a reconquered virility, O Spring.

No storms, no tempests, no hurricanes,

No spasms of long-nursed follies,

No violences of coveted passions,

No brazen display of warm desires and unclad sins,

No exaltation of fecund motherhood,

Nothing but the recurrence of an old fashion, the re-wearing of the discarded, ignoble dress of green, a new coat of perfumed rouge over the wrinkles of the same old yellow face of the world. . . .

The volume owes its defiant eloquence to the cumulative effect of its poems more than it does to any one poem. Yet there is one restrained outcry that, were it surrounded by nothing but mediocrity, would mark the volume with a brilliant and I might say bloody stamp. As a personal document of a man in prison, it is unrivaled even by *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. I refer to "The Walker." It is epical; epochal. As an art-work,

it is one of the most remarkable things our literature can boast. But it is something beyond that. It is a poetic epitome of a creed, a movement that is both political and religious. I do not think that the growth of Socialism has produced, with the exception of The Communist Manifesto, a more noble or inspired piece of literature. And yet it cannot be called a Socialist poem. These powerful paragraphs contain that which is greater than parties or programs. If it is propaganda at all, it is propaganda in the highest and most widespread sense of the word; it takes on the quality not so much of the Commune as of a communion. It is impossible to give an idea of its tense and concentrated force by quotation; it is seven pages long and the poem gains force with every passage. But even at the risk of committing a crime against art, I reprint two excerpts that may give some idea of the mood as well as the mechanics of "The Walker."

I hear footsteps over my head all night.

They come and they go. Again they come and they go all night.

They come one eternity in four paces and they go one eternity in four paces, and between the coming and the going there is Silence and the Night and the Infinite.

For infinite are the nine feet of a prison cell, and endless is the march of him who walks between the yellow brick wall and the red iron gate, thinking things that cannot be chained and cannot be locked, but that wander far away in the sunlit world, each in a wild pilgrimage after a destined goal.

Throughout the restless night I hear the footsteps over my head.

Who walks? I know not. It is the phantom of the jail, the sleepless brain, a man, the man, the Walker.

One-two-three-four: four paces and the wall.
One-two-three-four: four paces and the iron gate.

He has measured his space, he has measured it accurately, scrupulously, minutely, as the hangman measures the rope and the grave-digger the coffin—so many feet, so many inches, so many fractions of an inch for each of the four paces.

One-two-three-four. Each step sounds heavy and hollow over my head, and the echo of each step sounds hollow within my head as I count them in suspense and in dread that once, perhaps, in the endless walk, there may be five steps instead of four between the yellow brick wall and the red iron gate.

But he has measured the space so accurately, so scrupulously, so minutely that nothing breaks the grave rhythm of the slow, fantastic march.

When all are asleep (and who knows but I when all sleep?) three things are still awake in the night: the Walker, my heart and the old clock which has the soul of a fiend—for never, since a coarse hand with red hair on its fingers swung for the first time the pendulum in the jail, has the old clock tick-tocked a full hour of joy.

Yet the old clock which marks everything, and records everything, and to everything tolls the death-knell, the wise old clock that knows everything, does not know the number of the footsteps of the Walker, nor the throbs of my heart.

For not for the Walker, nor for my heart is there a second, a minute, an hour or anything that is in the old clock—there is nothing but the night, the sleepless night, the watchful, wistful night, the footsteps that go, and footsteps that come and the wild, tumultuous beatings that trail after them forever.

That is all the Walker thinks, as he walks throughout the night.

And that is what two hundred minds drowned in the dark-

ness and the silence of the night think, and that is also what I think.

- Wonderful is the supreme wisdom of the jail that makes all think the same thought. Marvelous is the providence of the law that equalizes all, even in mind and sentiment. Fallen is the last barrier of privilege, the aristocracy of the intellect. The democracy of reason has leveled all the two hundred minds to the common surface of the same thought.
- I, who have never killed, think like the murderer;
- I, who have never stolen, reason like the thief;
- I think, reason, wish, hope, doubt, wait like the hired assassin, the embezzler, the forger, the counterfeiter, the incestuous, the raper, the drunkard, the prostitute, the pimp,—I, I who used to think of love and life and flowers and song and beauty and the ideal. . . .
- 'A little key, a little key as little as my little finger, a little key of shining brass.
- All my ideas, my thoughts, my dreams are congealed in a little key of shiny brass.
- All my brain, all my soul, all the suddenly surging latent powers of my deepest life are in the pocket of a whitehaired man dressed in blue.
- He is great, powerful, formidable, the man with the white hair, for he has in his pocket the mighty talisman which makes one man cry, and one man pray, and one laugh, and one cough, and one walk, and all keep awake and listen and think the same maddening thought.
- Greater than all men is the man with the white hair and the small brass key, for no other man in the world could compel two hundred men to think for so long the same thought. Surely when the light breaks I will write a hymn unto him which shall hail him greater than Mohammed and Arbues and Torquemada and Mesmer, and all the other masters of other men's thoughts. I shall call him Almighty, for he holds everything of all and of me in a little brass key in his pocket.
- Everything of me he holds but the branding iron of contempt and the claymore of hatred for the monstrous

cabala that can make the apostle and the murderer, the poet and the procurer, think of the same gate, the same key and the same exit on the different sunlit highways of life.

Giovannitti is less successful when he employs the more formal manner. This is somewhat strange, since he has the Latin's knack of rhyme and a turn for the musical phrase. With these gifts, the restricted forms should be simple for him, being far less difficult than his larger rhythms. Possibly, they do come easily to himtoo easily—and he neglects to pick and prune; he does not stop to search for the word that illuminates rather than the word that merely fits. The bulk of his rhymed poetry is inferior to Francis Adams' crudely-made but more poignant, rebellious lyrics in Songs of the Army of the Night. I do not mean to give the impression that his work in strict meters is ineffective; sometimes, however. it is merely effective, often conventional, even patterned. Here, for instance (in "The Republic"), is the last half of the best of the rhymed poems; illustrating the mixture of splendid, original lines and echoes of a music and an idiom that were scarcely ever fresh.

> So, loud into the midnight air She rang the tocsin's weird alarm, She called, and as by potent charm From its mysterious haunt and lair,

> The Mob, the mightiest judge of all, To hear the rights of Man came out, And every word became a shout, And every shout a musket ball.

Arturo Giovannitti

Against the castle walls the picks She raised and planted there her flags, Against the ermine hurled the rags, The torch against the crucifix,

The guillotine against the rope; And ere the eastern sky grew red, Behold she flung the king's proud head Upon the altars of the pope.

And when upon the great sunrise Flew her disheveled victories To all the lands, on all the seas, Like angry eagles in the skies,

To ring the call of brotherhood And hail mankind from shore to shore, Wrapt in her splendid tricolor The People's virgin bride she stood.

This was the dawn. But when the day Wore out with all its festive songs, And all the hearts, and all the tongues Were stilled in wonder and dismay,—

When night with velvet-sandaled feet Stole in her chamber's solitude, Behold! she lay there naked, lewd, A drunken harlot of the street,

With withered breasts and shaggy hair Soiled by each wanton, frothy kiss, Between a sergeant of police And a decrepit millionaire.

A propagandist and patriot—for Giovannitti was an impatient advocate of war against Germany long before his fellow-liberals were inflamed at the exposure of the

Junkers' dishonor and the crime of Brest-Litovsk—he has never been untrue to his dream of democracy of labor. Always the vision of an uplifted faith and a hatred of lies and intolerance has held him "rigid and inexpugnable." In nothing has this risen to a greater eloquence than in his passionate chant "When the Cock Crows" (in *The Masses*, October, 1917), which was inspired by the brutal lynching of Frank Little, a labor leader. Here is the quiet prelude and its passionate climax:

Six men drove up to his house at midnight, and woke the poor woman who kept it,

And asked her: "Where is the man who spoke against war and insulted the army?"

And the old woman took fear of the men and the hour, and showed them the room where he slept,

And when they made sure it was he whom they wanted, they dragged him out of his bed with blows, tho' he was willing to walk,

And they fastened his hands on his back, and they drove him across the black night,

And there was no moon and no stars and not any visible thing, and even the faces of the men were eaten with the leprosy of the dark, for they were masked with black shame,

And nothing showed in the gloom save the glow of his eyes and the flame of his soul that scorched the face of Death . . .

Now he is dead, but now that he is dead is the door of your dungeon faster, O money changers and scribes, and priests and masters of slaves?

Are men now readier to die for you without asking the wherefore of the slaughter?

Shall now the pent-up spirit no longer connive with the sun against your midnight?

And are we now all reconciled to your rule, and are you safer and we humbler, and is the night eternal and the day forever blotted out of the skies,

And all blind yesterdays risen, and all tomorrows entombed, Because of six faceless men and ten feet of rope and one corpse dangling unseen in the blackness under a railroad trestle?

No, I say, no! It swings like a terrible pendulum that shall soon ring out a mad tocsin and call the red cock to the crowing.

No, I say, no, for someone will bear witness of this to the dawn,

Someone will stand straight and fearless tomorrow between the armed hosts of your slaves, and shout to them the challenge of that silence you could not break.

"Brothers—he will shout to them—are you then the Godborn reduced to a mute of dogs.

That you will rush to the hunt of your kin at the blowing of a horn?

Brothers, have then the centuries that created new suns in the heavens, gouged out the eyes of your soul,

That you should wallow in your blood like swine,

That you should squirm like rats in a carrion,

That you, who astonished the eagles, should beat blindly about the night of murder like bats?

Are you, Brothers, who were meant to scale the stars, to crouch forever before a footstool,

And listen forever to one word of shame and subjection,

And leave the plough in the furrow, the trowel on the wall, the hammer on the anvil, and the heart of the race on the knees of screaming women, and the future of the race in the hands of babbling children.

And yoke on your shoulders the halter of hatred and fury, And dash head-down against the bastions of folly,

Because a colored cloth waves in the air, because a drum beats in the street,

Because six men have promised you a piece of ribbon on your coat, a carved tablet on a wall and your name in a list bordered with black?

Shall you, then, be forever the stewards of death, when life waits for you like a bride?

Ah no, Brothers, not for this did our mothers shriek with pain and delight when we tore their flanks with our first cry;

Not for this were we given command of the beasts,

Not with blood but with sweat were we bidden to achieve our salvation.

Behold! I announce now to you great tidings of joy,

For if your hands that are gathered in sheaves for the sickle of war unite as a bouquet of flowers between the warm breasts of peace,

Freedom will come without any blows save the hammers on the chains of your wrists, and the picks on the walls of your jails!

Arise, and against every hand jeweled with the rubies of murder,

Against every mouth that sneers at the tears of mercy,

Against every foul smell of the earth,

Against every head that a footstool raises over your head,

Against every word that was written before this was said,

Against every happiness that never knew sorrow,

And every glory that never knew love and sweat,

Against silence and death, and fear

Arise with a mighty roar!

Arise and declare your war;

For the wind of the dawn is blowing,

For the eyes of the East are glowing,

For the lark is up and the cock is crowing,

And the day of judgment is here!"

This contagious fervor never deserts him. We hear it in his rushing battle-cries, in his ironic soliloquies, even

Arturo Giovannitti

199

in the toil-haunted love-songs. It is such a fusing of beauty, belligerence and purpose as upsets our standards and rears one of its own. And if Art cannot make room for the message, it is more than likely that Art will be uncomfortably crowded by a force stronger than itself.

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EZRA POUND

No living American poet started with more promise and is concluding with less performance than Ezra He began by blazing his own path through a trampled forest. Then he started wandering off whenever he saw a by-road, followed every curious twist and turn, pursued the will-o'-the-wisps of the bizarre, and finally lost himself in the backwoods and marshes of literature. Beginning with an athletic vigor and indubitable freshness of feeling, he made his early work singularly his own; he did something to words and accents that, even though it speedily degenerated into a tight mannerism, was an impetus and influence to a small regiment of writers. He was one of the most pitiless antagonists of the mawkish and treacle-dripping verse that was being manufactured and retailed under the gaudy label of poetry. He fought dullness in whatever form he encountered it; it was under his leadership that the Imagists became not only a group but a protest. Deserted by his disciples, left alone now on his lonely if not lordly eminence, descending at times to conduct a brief guerrilla warfare, he presents a picture not without its poignance—the spectacle of the prophet, scorning honor in his own country, living abroad and, having failed to find glory there, sending back barbed reminders of his existence to the land he has discarded.

No one can blame a poet for changing his residence; and the habit of sending home vituperations from a distance of three thousand miles is too safe to seem seri-

ously vindictive. And it is scarcely fair to argue, as has been attempted, that England changed the eager, creative boy into a literary snob. One may become as completely immersed in the pedantry of culture in the Philadelphia which Pound left as in the Bohemia of London which he now inhabits. There was undoubtedly something of the scholiast and a little of the antiquarian in his nonage; even his first book, for all its intensity, throbs with a passion that is, at bottom, a literary passion.

Provença, published in 1911 by Small, Maynard & Co., is an American edition that contains practically all of the three slim volumes that were brought out by Elkin Mathews under the intriguing titles Personae. Exultations and Cansoniere. It is a remarkably interesting, contradictory and irritating book. It is free in feeling and confined in expression; it is by turns highly individual and strongly derivative, carelessly sincere and studiously poised; dextrous, exciting and distressingly dull. It is not that Pound devotes his energy to the resuscitation of a long-dead past; his failure lies in the fact that, for all his spells and incantations, he never really resurrects it. Out of the pages of Provença come the easily recognizable voices of Browning, Villon and the less familiar accents of the Provençal singers; even when he is not consciously imitating Bertran de Born, Arnault Daniel and Jaufré Rudel, his poetry often seems a worn echo of theirs. The influence of Browning is particularly strong, even in the adaptations from the jongleurs; witness, for example, the self-satiric "Famam Librosque Cano" and "Marvoil" which fall into the identical idiom that is so typical of "Sordello":

"A poor clerk I, 'Arnault the less' they call me, And because I have small mind to sit Day long, long day cooped on a stool A-jumbling o' figures for Maitre Jacques Polin, I ha' taken to rambling the South here."

But when Pound lays aside the half-ruminating, halfnarrative manner of Browning, when he is less concerned with the ballata, the canzon and the planh of the troubadours, he discloses a more arresting and far more powerful figure. Here he achieves a half-defiant, halfdisdainful independence. Even though the overtones of other and more recent singers are still in the air, one can hear Pound's own voice rising with a grave fierceness in poems like "Revolt," "Histrion," "Praise of Ysolt" and the stark

BALLAD FOR GLOOM

For God, our God, is a gallant foe That playeth behind the veil.

I have loved my God as a child at heart That seeketh deep bosoms for rest, I have loved my God as maid to man But lo, this thing is best:

To love your God as a gallant foe that plays behind the veil,

To meet your God as the night winds meet beyond Arcturus' pale.

I have played with God for a woman,
I have staked with my God for truth,
I have lost to my God as a man, clear eyed,
His dice be not of ruth.

For I am made as a naked blade, But hear ye this thing in sooth:

Who loseth to God as man to man
Shall win at the turn of the game.
I have drawn my blade where the
lightnings meet
But the ending is the same:
Who loseth to God as the sword blades lose
Shall win at the end of the game.

For God, our God, is a gallant foe that playeth behind the veil, Whom God deigns not to overthrow Hath need of triple mail.

Still finer is the quiet intensity of the "Idyl for Glaucus," the brusque vigor of "Pierre Vidal Old," "Sestina: Altaforte," the unsentimental tenderness of such a brief moment as

PICCADILLY

Beautiful, tragical faces, Ye that were whole, and are so sunken; And, O ye vile, ye that might have been loved, That are so sodden and drunken, Who hath forgotten you?

O wistful, fragile faces, few out of many!

The gross, the coarse, the brazen,
God knows I cannot pity them, perhaps, as
I should do,
But, oh, ye delicate, wistful faces,
Who hath forgotten you?

It is such writing that stood out from things that were superficial and much that was artificial. In the midst of borrowings and experiments in form, one came suddenly upon lines so passionate and imagination so exuberant that they seemed to possess an almost physical force. Here is a part of another distinctive example.

BALLAD OF THE GOODLY FERE

Ha' we lost the goodliest fere o' all For the priests and the gallows tree? Aye lover he was of brawny men, O' ships and the open sea.

When they came wi' a host to take Our Man His smile was good to see,
"First let these go!" quo' our Goodly Fere,
"Or I'll see ye damned," says he.

Aye he sent us out through the crossed high spears

And the scorn of his laugh rang free,
"Why took ye not me when I walked about
Alone in the town?" says he.

Oh we drank his "Hale" in the good red wine When we last made company, No capon priest was the Goodly Fere But a man o' men was he.

Witness also the rich simplicity of this "Greek Epigram":

Day and night are never weary, Nor yet is God of creating For day and night their torch-bearers, The aube and the crepuscule.

So, when I weary of praising the dawn and the sunset,

Let me be no more counted among the immortals; But number me amid the wearying ones, Let me be a man as the herd, And as the slave that is given in barter.

Here we have, in nine eloquent lines, Pound in pettohis power and his limitations. He is a modernist using his instrument as if it were the tool of an archaeologist; he is a poet expressing himself in terms of the pedant. One thinks, as one turns to his next book, of the challenging sentences from his "Revolt":

> Great God, grant life in dreams— Not dalliance, but life! Let us be men that dream— Not cowards, dabblers, waiters For dead Time to re-awaken . . .

One thinks of these lines—and turns (passing the scholarly but stilted translations of The Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti) to Lustra (Alfred A. Knopf, 1917). The range and variety of this collection are its most outstanding qualities and its chief defects. Lustra seems a catch-all for Pound's slightest utterance. Together with some genuinely notable work, there are brittle fragments in the imagist manner, lugubrious cantos in a kind of Sordello form, arrangements in the vorticist vein, epigrams from the Greek, Lalage and other ladies from the Latin, paraphrases from the German, scraps from the early Anglo-Saxon, snatches of Spanish, idioms from the Italian, water-colors from the Chinese. faint echoes from old Provence—one gets nothing so much as a confused jumble and smattering of erudition. The effect, for all its geographical inclusiveness, is less that of a man of the world than of a man about literature. All he has read of what's abroad is carefully noted. collected, tagged and set down. Nothing is too inconsequential or unworthy for preservation. It is all here; even the absurd apostrophe to Swinburne ("Salve Pontifex"), the heavy attempt at humor in "Les Millwin," the cheap gibe of "Our Contemporaries" and the inane, schoolboy burlesque of "Summer is icummen in." What makes this lust for print the more puzzling is the fact that Pound still possesses a selective as well as a critical gift. In fact the concentrative faculty (as is proved by his transcriptions in the section "Cathay," a series of poems skilfully arranged from Fenollosa's notes) is his most salient trait. What then can even the most enthusiastic of his quondam admirers say to the awkward and malformed versions of the eight Heine poems that read like so many witless parodies, the paper-motto silliness of such a couplet as:

THE NEW CAKE OF SOAP

Lo, how it glistens in the sun Like the cheek of a Chesterton.

or "Papyrus" which I quote in its cryptic entirety:

PAPYRUS

Spring . . . Too long . . . Gongula . . .

This overmastering desire to exhibit every turn and triviality, to sacrifice no bit of table-talk, to let not one bad joke blush unseen, spoils many a bright page and most of the volume, just as it ruined his book of prose, *Pavannes and Divisions* (Knopf, 1918). Pound chatters on, and his wandering loquacity makes one forget that this poet actually achieves some amazing effects both as a colorist and an ironist. In the midst of scrapped experiments, filings and tailings from the craftsman's

workshop, one can find, with diligence and patience, such sharp performances as "Phasellus Illes," "New York," "Arides," "The Social Order," "Ripostes" and this excellent

PORTRAIT D'UNE FEMME

Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea,
London has swept about you this score years
And bright ships left you this or that in fee:
Ideas, old gossip, oddments of all things,
Strange spars of knowledge and dimmed wares of
price.

Great minds have sought you—lacking someone else. You have been second always. Tragical? No. You preferred it to the usual thing: One dull man, dulling and uxorious, One average mind—with one thought less, each year. Oh, you are patient, I have seen you sit Hours, where something might have floated up. And now you pay one. Yes, you richly pay. You are a person of some interest, one comes to you And takes strange gain away: Trophies fished up; some curious suggestion: Fact that leads nowhere; and a tale for two. Pregnant with mandrakes, or with something else That might prove useful and yet never proves, That never fits a corner or shows use, Or finds its hour upon the loom of days: The tarnished, gaudy, wonderful old work; Idols and ambergris and rare inlays. These are your riches, your great store; and yet For all this sea-hoard of deciduous things. Strange woods half sodden, and new brighter stuff: In the slow float of differing light and deep, No! there is nothing! In the whole and all, Nothing that's quite your own. Yet this is you.

It is interesting also to observe how cold irony gives way to hot anger in "The Rest," "Salutation" and "Commission." I quote the first few lines of the last:

Go, my songs, to the lonely and the unsatisfied, Go also to the nerve-wracked, go to the enslaved-byconvention,

Bear to them my contempt for their oppressors. Go as a great wave of cool water, Bear my contempt of oppressors.

Speak against unconscious oppression, Speak against the tyranny of the unimaginative, Speak against bonds.

Go to the bourgeoise who is dying of her ennuis, Go to the women in suburbs.
Go to the hideously wedded,
Go to them whose failure is concealed,
Go to the unluckily mated,
Go to the bought wife,
Go to the woman entailed.

All this challenging invocation would be much more impressive, if Pound's songs really did go! But if there is anything they do not do, they do not

Go to the bourgeoise . . .

Nor do they

Go in a friendly manner, Go with an open speech.

In fact, they do not go at all, but remain for the delight of the cognoscenti, the delicately attuned, the nuance-worshipers. It is a false erudition that has mis-

led Pound; he mistakes "the flicker for the flame." He is, in spite of his declared interest in oppressors and women in suburbs, scarcely concerned with anything so common. He is far more interested in the intricacies of the Romance languages than in romance. But his aesthetic preoccupations have had some delicate results. Any lover of things exquisitely made will find much to admire in the subleties of light, shadow, movement and what is naïvely called "atmosphere" in such brief pictures as "Albatre," "Gentildonna," "Fish," "The Encounter," the "Fan-Piece for Her Imperial Lord," a splendid piece of condensation from an original many times as long (compare it with the version on page 101 of Herbert Giles's A History of Chinese Literature), "The Coming of War," this beautifully fashioned

$A\Omega PIA$

Be in me as the eternal moods
of the bleak wind, and not
As transient things are—
gaiety of flowers.

Have me in the strong loneliness
of sunless cliffs
And of grey waters.
Let the gods speak softly of us
In days hereafter,
The shadowy flowers of Orcus
Remember Thee.

or this brief and brilliant flash:

IN A STATION OF THE METRO

The apparition of these faces in the crowd; Petals on a wet, black bough.

Throughout the volume one senses, even in the best of his technical pieces, that decadence which appraises the values in life chiefly as aesthetic values. And this decadence expresses itself in a literary sophistication, a weariness an imaginative sterility. It affects Pound not only as a recorder of emotions but as a once richly creative artist. An anonymous writer in The New Republic has put the matter pointedly. Following the line of reasoning that in Pound's new work the native heat is lacking and that his art has come back upon itself, he writes: "For atrophy of the aesthetic values is bound to follow the loss or stunting by an artist of other values. The truth is that neither can with impunity be immured or aggrandized at the expense of ' the other. It is the same whether the world or an artist make the attempt. Life is impoverished, and with life, art. So the world has grown smaller for Pound. He questions, he feels, less. Therefore song does not come. . . . He does, instead, the stock French thing of chinoiseries, vignettes, etc., which seem new. only because Anglo-Saxons generally know so little of French literature. When content has become for an artist merely something to inflate and display form with, then the petty serves as well as the great, the ignoble equally with the lofty, the unlovely like the beautiful, the sordid as the clean. For the purpose anything does. Values become lost or blurred and all things are regarded as intrinsically equal. Real feeling consequently becomes rarer, and the artist descends to trivialities of observation, vagaries of assertion, or mere bravado of standards and expression—pure tilting at convention."

Lustra thus becomes something more than a haphazard and nondescript collection. It is, in spite of its

apparent belligerence, the record of a retreat, a gradual withdrawal from life. In the early days when Pound moved his physical lar and his æsthetic penates to London, he gave promise of achieving a personal utterance to match a decided personality. The foreign influences in Personae and Exultations were unmistakable, but they were not overmastering. The passage of a few years pronounced what, under the guise of something that looked like a revolt, was really an inverted and more involved scholasticism. His was an impatient, wavering rebellion that turns, when nothing else avails, even against itself. Pound, it became evident, was no intrepid explorer, no pathfinder. He became an exponent of "movements"; a scholiast alternating between an incurably romantic veneration of the past and a cloistral aversion to the crowd. He was not so much a leader as a joiner of schools. A press-agent rather than a pioneer. Now it is classicism that he celebrates: then Imagism; then a dab at Futurism; then a furtive effort to look at the violence of life in terms of Vorticism-always the contact with the actual world is feared. More and more he shrinks back into literature: "Three Cantos" is a conglomeration of dialects. The précieux is regnant.

And so in Lustra we find him established. His early invocation praying for

Not dalliance, but life! Let us be men that dream— Not cowards, dabblers, waiters For dead Time to re-awaken

—this has a mocking and rather pathetic sound after reading Pound's recent book. He has, in spite of his sporadic excursions in the revolutionary, become just this—a dabbler, dallying with dreams, "a waiter for dead Time to re-awaken." He has developed into a connoisseur of the curious; a formalist arguing in a musty and deserted class-room. It is not life he seeks but the library; and there he has locked himself in. Once in a while he opens a window and hears people laughing and brawling in the street. But he listens only for a moment. The window is slammed, the curtains are drawn, the midnight oil is lit—and he is back again, picking his way through literatures, amassing technicalities, and dreaming of himself in his favorite rôle: the aristogogue in power, the pundit on parade. The gross total of his erudition seems staggering, the net result infinitesimal.

And yet there is a definite distinction in Pound's work. His painstaking study in collecting literatures has yielded him an accent, an attitude. He maintains a certain grace of bearing, even when he poses before the mirror of his art, draped in a coat of many cultures that he has constructed, patch by patch, from other and more original designers. He has really little to say, but he says that little in a manner that gives his words the tone of authority. It is not so much the phrases as his gestures that are distinguished and arresting. It is the wave of the hand that explains and identifies Pound. Some of his followers who are not so well-known have surpassed him in his own métiers: the Aldingtons are far more genuinely Hellenic and chiseled than he; T. S. Eliot has a much lighter touch in recording the ironies and overtones of conversation; John Gould Fletcher is a more daring experimenter in the clash of colors: Maxwell Bodenheim has a more

delicate and dextrous imagination—but Pound triumphs in the gesture. He raises his arm, his fingers become nimble, his eyebrows go up—and what, when spoken, is tawdry and trivial, becomes glamorous with a suggestion of mystery. This is his power. The effect is that of a verbal legerdemain; the speech is mostly dumb-show, but he still simulates the magic of life. He is like Gordon Craig's super-marionette and his art is poetry in pantomime.

JOHN HALL WHEELOCK

In considering the work of our contemporary poets, the volumes of John Hall Wheelock offer a peculiarly interesting and contradictory subject for study. For Wheelock is a poet whose contradictions are almost as interesting as his consistencies. Expressing himself for the most part in absolutely regular, rhymed stanzas (chiefly in quatrains), he has put in his tightly organized work a love for the inchoate city that is scarcely less intense than Sandburg's. A singer first and last, he invests even the most melodic of his verses with the driving power of thought. His philosophy is obviously that of "Leaves of Grass," his music usually that of a folk-song; the social fervor is merged in a lyric fire.

Take Wheelock's first volume and examine its curious vitality. Echoes of Whitman, Shelley and Edwin Arlington Robinson can be detected in it, but what rises clearest out of *The Human Fantasy* (Sherman, French & Co., 1911) is the voice of a new and almost over-exuberant poet, a poet on fire with youth. This lavish enthusiasm carries Wheelock beyond much that is merely shouting and repetitions. For it is this wide-sweeping love of existence, this sense of casual beneficence that gives his earliest rhapsodies so sympathetic a touch. Here, with its reminders of Henley, is the first poem in his first book:

I see you stand before me,— Bizarre, absurd, enchanting,— (The swinging, silver satchel, The dear, ridiculous dress),

A little, dauntless figure, Half lost in the enormous Gay picture-hat bowed forward Across the eager face.

Its single feather trembles
Against the dusk. Beyond you
The squalid, huddled city
With one red, flaring lamp

Looms sinister and haunting,

—The wastes that bred and bore you,—
A mockery heartbreaking,
A menace and a joke.

But you stand all unknowing,—Glad-hearted, well, and reckless, Magnanimous and merry,
My lost one,—O my youth!

And two pages later, this poet (then in his early twenties and writing before a line of Frost had ever appeared in America) rejoices in "the dear, sensual Fact of things," speaks of "the clear reality of life, filled with laughter and eternal strength," hails

The carnal buoyance and the common sense Of sane and sensual humanity.

and writes this as an initial declaration:

The vastitude of space comes down to your own door, Equally with the stars; the common and the street Are part of the great Beauty that shines from shore to shore.

The universe divine lies around us at our feet— Tangible, made of dust, and holy to the core.

Not in a world beyond lies wonder, nor above

Nor throned among the spheres, nor set for days to be—

Over you and beneath, whether you sleep or move,

Reaches the moral Fact, the starry Eternity—

And all the hell of hate and all the heaven of love. . . .

Before your generation and you go hurrying by, Have you no word for all, of pure and starriest breath! O, how the common doom transfigures Destiny. In the dear thought of all who pass through life and death, Splendid it is to live and glorious to die.

"Splendid it is to live and glorious to die"—this might be the motto of *The Human Fantasy*. It shines out of all the poems, even the more obviously youthful and overstressed verses. And it rises, with little diminution of power, from "Midnight Down Town," "Sunday in the Park," "Noon," "Shop-Girls," "The New Christs," "A Portrait," "Old Women," "Whistles at Night" and this graphic:

MEMORIES OF THE CITY

The sound of the organ-grinder here by the dunes, With the bright sea and beaches all around, Wakes in my heart a melancholy profound; The wheezy melodies and old, cracked tunes Have a remembered sound.

I seem to feel the city's roar again—
The Park, the benches, the electric light
Far down the pavement burning cold and bright,
The avenues and winding parkways, when
The trees are black with night.

The sidewalks in their empty loneliness;
And just beyond tall buildings, dark and dread,
With one star visible when you turned your head,—
Your laughter and your gaudy little dress
And all the words you said.

In the full noontide quivering and quick, 'Mid all this beauty splendid and supreme, How pitiful these tawdry memories seem, Like a forgotten perfume, faint and sick, Or faces in a dream.

Alas for dreams that wander under heaven, Old, futile memories of the foolish years, Full of ridiculous old hopes and fears, So sordid and so commonplace, not even Tragic enough for tears!

The soul of the city is actually in these poems; within its monstrous walls Wheelock feels "the lovable, sordid humanity that pervades it—common, but how careless and brave, how divine at core!" In no poem in contemporary literature has this been so simply expressed as in these lines, which can stand with the most magical of American lyrics, not even excluding Poe's "To Helen":

SUNDAY EVENING IN THE COMMON

Look—on the topmost branches of the world The blossoms of the myriad stars are thick; Over the huddled rows of stone and brick A few, sad wisps of empty smoke are curled Like ghosts, languid and sick.

One breathless moment now the city's moaning Fades, and the endless streets seem vague and dim; There is no sound around the whole world's rim, Save in the distance a small band is droning Some desolate old hymn.

Van Wyck, how often have we been together When this same moment made all mysteries clear,— The infinite stars that brood above us here, And the gray city in the soft June weather, So tawdry, and so dear!

It is this sense of intimacy and awe that transmutes his glimpses of reality; more than a few times the note struck is as dominant as Henley's. Wheelock has something of the vision which uplifts sensuality and enough of the realist's passion to save mysticism from itself by humanizing it. Sometimes his unfettered exultations overleap themselves and the poem becomes a welter of uneven lines and inchoate music; frequently his rhapsodic eagerness extends his verses into rhetoric and verbosity. In an effort to invest old phrases with new glamor and hoping to emphasize his attitude, he overuses such striking connotations as "dear, ridiculous," "tawdry, pathetic," "sane and sensual" (a special favorite of Wheelock's). He is even so intent on his song that he uses, again and again, such outworn poetic platitudes as "fierce and flaming suns," "luminous heavens," "the boundless blue," "radiant loveliness," "vague alarms" and others of a similar, worn-down rubber stamp. But, even at its worst, The Human Fantasy is an amazing first book; at its best, it is clear and distinctive, reflecting that high realism which is the color of life.

In Wheelock's second book, The Beloved Adventure (Sherman, French & Co., 1912), there is a slight dilution of the strain so prominent in the initial volume; the repetitions of thought and phrase are more marked; there are times when the poems, animated by nothing so much as sheer high-spirits, seem boyish rather than

buoyant. A more careful grouping and a judicious use of the blue pencil would have improved the newer collection, particularly the love-songs in the manner of Heine and the mood of Symons. And the omission of such adolescent verse as "Twilight and Dawn," "Parting in Spring" and one or two others would have strengthened his offering. As it is, they set the others in bolder relief. The opening section, "Sea Poems," is particularly charged with the athletic music that surged in his city poems, and here it takes on a freer, out-of-door vigor. Witness "Along the Dunes," "September by the Sea," "A Hymn from the Beaches" and

BY THE PAVILION

The beach was silent in the night, Covered with mist and gray. The sea-dunes under the moonlight night Stretched far away.

From where the grotesque pavilion stood There came a clapping of hands, From where the grotesque pavilion stood Before the sands.

A tired old accordion
Struck up a sudden tune—
The sound of a squeaky accordion
Under the moon.

With a gay air the player played The song "Sweet Annie Moore," The feet of the player beat, as he played, The wooden floor.

And to the tawdry, pathetic tune
A murmur of voices sang—
With dancing and laughter the panting tune
Echoed and rang.

John Hall Wheelock

A sound of glad, old memories The quiet music had— Old human hopes and memories, Half gay, half sad.

So that, as singing the dancers danced And the thin music sighed, My heart leaped up in my breast and danced, And my heart cried.

For the pavilion and the weak song Under the starlight seemed Like something known in a dream, and the song Like a song dreamed.

And by the shining September sea I heard in the squalid sound Something more great than the night or the sea Reaching around,—

The love that links all men together, Divided by waves and wars— The sorrow of all hearts beating together Under the stars.

Or turn, as an illustrative contrast, to the dramatic poems in "Irma," to the vitalized narrative of the old Psalmist and the virgin Shunamite in "The Last Days of King David," to the pitying tenderness of "To No. 42 Who Declared He Was the Christ," "Nirvana," or this snatch of unrhymed cadence (pace the Imagists!):

The old, familiar Beauty
Caressed by the world's dead hands,
Beauty, so old and weary,
Beloved of a thousand lovers,
Worn with a thousand kisses,
Surprising—beneficent—holy—
Comes to us all in the end.

Or examine these ringing stanzas where, in six sharp quatrains, there is as direct a challenge to the placid complacency of everyday as has appeared since Francis Adams' incisive songs:

TO THE AVERAGE MAN

How can you rust your flesh with ulcerous ills And wreak upon yourself a sensual wrong, When lowing cattle on a thousand hills Take the dumb death to make your body strong!

'Mid lurid city and in loathsome den Eternal spirits work for you and wake, And all the hearts of all the world of men Are laboring on together for your sake.

The cloth and very garment that you wear Against your heart, in distant lands afar Was wrought by hearts more aged in despair— How shall you answer them for what you are?

Will you return them nothing for all this! For factories, wheels, and grim machineries whirled, Sages that plumb for you the huge Abyss, And the vast Science of the modern world.

Heroes and warriors that for you have bled, Farmers tilling the stubble field and stone, The austere host of the heroic dead Who cleared the way and wrought for you alone.

Your mother bore and bred you at her breast With holy longing and with patient pain— And the dawn wakes you, and the stars give rest; Shall all these influences be in vain!

In one's interest in Wheelock's intensity, one is likely to gloss over the exquisite and seemingly unconscious images that lie half-concealed beneath the surface of many of the poems. These images are short, almost fragmentary; they start imagination on a dozen trails instead of making it an unwilling huntsman in one definite and uninspired chase. Always the figure is an integral part of the thought; never (as Lord Alfred Douglas is so fond of doing) does Wheelock build a poem around a merely serviceable metaphor. In a couple of pages one comes across phrases like:

"The white sea labors, line on plunging line, Toward a blind goal . . ."

and

"The heaven opens her stars . . .

A sudden sword of moonlight strikes on the sea . . ."

or this memorable figure:

"Against the barriers of the banished day Night flutters like a vast, ungainly moth."

or, as a more detailed piece of delicate picture-making, turn to "Moonlight Night," which begins:

Ah, though I were a ghost,
To-night I should fare forth under the host
Of the immaculate stars
To seek you. Though beyond the utmost bars
Of the world's bourne you were,
Though hid beyond the Morning's flaming hair
And the bowed Twilight's head—
On such a night, though I were doomed and dead,
I should arise, alas,
And seek for you, between the dewy grass
And the pale, marble moon. . . .

Here is a splendid example of how Wheelock has taken an old rhetoric and an older music and has done

something with them that gives them character. Nothing could be less individualized than the languor and lilt of his "Serenade"; and yet there is a muance here that is Wheelock's own; a turn, a touch that makes it an utterance rather than an echo.

SERENADE ·

The stars are out, and the heavens are silent and very deep! My heart was wakeful and wild, and hungry to be with the stars,

I rose and came to thy window; but thou, my beloved, sleep.

Sleep, though my heart be wild and wakeful and full of unrest;

The crickets are still, and the breezes creep in at thy window, sweet:

Thy right arm is under thy head, and thy left lies over thy breast.

Sleep till the wind be dead and the stars swoon out of the skies.

The world is full of laughter and weeping and passionate prayer;

More soft than the night on the waters are thine eyelids over thine eyes.

I lay in my chamber dreaming, but my heart would leave me no rest;

I thought, when the morrow dawns I shall never see her again—

And my heart grew loud in my veins, my heart grew mad in my breast.

I said: "I will rise and go, and sing to her in the night; She will wake from her sleep and come, and come to me where I sing,

And come to my arms where I stand, alone, in the pale starlight."

But sleep, it is better, beloved, than vexing thee with my cries:

The world is full of laughter, and weeping, and passionate prayer;

More soft than the night on the waters are thine eyelids over thine eyes.

The succeeding volume, after such splendid performances, is a bulky disappointment. Wheelock had evidently, for the time being, written himself out; instead of resting, he threw himself into the production of mere quantity. In Love and Liberation (Sherman, French & Co., 1913) he has poured repetition on repetition, sugar on treacle, beauty on banalities. The mere mathematical sum of the verses is staggering. There are two hundred and eleven pages in the book and the first one hundred and sixty-seven are devoted to lush lyrics (mostly two on a page) where the sentimental string is often tuned as flatly as:

Let me open to the Beauty Of your being all my breast, Life and longing, soul and body, Arms, lips, eyes, and all the rest!

Drink deep draughts in all around me Of your beauty, drink and drain Deep draughts of yourself around me, Love and loveliness and pain!

Give myself to you completely, Wholly and beyond recall— Joy and sorrow, soul and body, Life, and love, and song, and all!

Such incredible stanzas are, alas, not uncommon in this collection. Even where the verses are far less banal,

the effect is that of monotony long drawn out. Ten solid sections of love-songs-over two hundred and thirty none-too-varied variations on the amatory lute! The most versatile poet, turning out such a stream of rhymed ecstasies, would be likely to repeat himself. And this Wheelock emphatically does. To be accurate, he repeats himself repeatedly. The information that love is "terrible and strange" loses most of its thrill when the fact is insisted on, with such trifling changes as "terrible and sweet," "holy and terrible," etc., in countless reiterations. One is also likely to become wearied of Wheelock's continual "liberal and well" connotations, of his perpetual "whirling" of the poet's hair in "the wind of the morning" or "the sunset cloud," of his pathetically pathetic fallacies, and most of all of a maddeningly omnipresent and capitalized "Beauty" which is thrust forward at least once on every page.

This inability to reject what is third-rate and merely space-filling almost ruins Love and Liberation. And one cannot easily excuse the silly affectation of giving the volume so childish a subtitle as "The Songs of Adsched of Meru." The absurdity is too apparent; its exoticism too home-grown. The only foreign thing about the volume is its very heavy and very German influence. Many of these lyrics read like poor paraphrases of the least successful of Schubert's lieder; most of them seem to be impossible translations of songs that Heine never wrote. For example:

I would that I were a flower That encloses forevermore The "You" and the "Me" together; One in the deep heart's core. The lover and the beloved She bears in her breast alone, Inextricably interwoven, Deep in her breast made one.

There in the being beloved
The lover is rapt away;
The lover, drenched through with the loved one,
Laughs upward to greet the day. . . .

and so on, in the same imitative idiom. Or observe such bald, though doubtless only half-conscious plagiarisms, as in these two quatrains which might have been rejected from *Die Heimkehr*:

O beloved, when I heard it From your lips my very name First, how like a song it sounded, Still the same, yet not the same!

To myself another meaning Then was added, and a joy All tongues after your repeating Never wholly may destroy.

Sometimes, indeed, the pale resemblance to Heine is even stronger and is seen in something besides a series of clumsy inversions. Notice the verses beginning

Would that into your being Myself might slip, in the cup Of the flower of your spirit Forever folded up. . . .

Or such a poem as the one that opens with "Is it the nightingale's singing that warms my heart like wine?" Or the one that starts "Out of my sorrow I

have made this song "—which inevitably recalls Heine's "Aus meinen grossen Schmersen mach' ich die kleinen lieder," and recalls it much to Wheelock's disadvantage.

These incomprehensible inclusions with their quantitative errors in technique and judgment not only make Love and Liberation seem an unworthy successor to its forerunning volumes, they conceal, by their very bulk, the dozen or so really excellently fashioned poems. The patient reader will find, half-buried in the midst of bathos, such a burst as:

Lift your arms to the stars And give an immortal shout; Not all the veils of darkness Can put your beauty out!

You are armed with love, with love, Nor all the powers of Fate Can touch you with a spear, Nor all the hands of Hate.

What of good and evil, Hell and Heaven above—, Trample them with love! Ride over them with love!

Such rapture rises from the songs beginning

White morning awakes;
Dawn breaks her bars;
God's breath through the stars
Flickers and shakes.

and

The twilight is barred;
The dawn is arisen—
Light breaks from the East,
And Song from her prison.

Throughout the nobler poems there is this same intensity, a creative fervor that touches and transmutes generalities that would be either flabby or foolish. It glows even through the weaker stanzas and fires with passion such fine lines as those beginning: "The world is reckless for beauty," "Life burns us up like a fire," "Your body's motion is like music," "Night looked forth from the tower of morning" and the impulsive declaration that begins:

I shed my song on the feet of all men, On the feet of all shed out like wine; On the whole and the hurt I shed my bounty, The beauty within me that is not mine.

Following Love and Liberation came several years of silence. As Wheelock matured, he grew less and less fond of the routine phrases and easy abstractions. He withdrew almost completely into himself, distrusting the fluency that led him into flatulence. Recently he has begun again and his work shows a renewal of his first power with an even greater simplicity of speech. He is dealing once more with things rather than a too copious outpouring of inchoate emotion. Even his emotional moments have acquired a new restraint, as may be seen in "Earth," which I quote from The Yale Review and which, in spite of its reminders of Blake and Ralph Hodgson, has an accent that is Wheelock's own. It begins:

Grasshopper, your fairy song
And my poem alike belong
To the deep and silent earth
From which all poetry has birth;
All we say and all we sing
Is but as the murmuring

Of that drowsy heart of hers
When from her deep dream she stirs:
If we sorrow, or rejoice,
You and I are but her voice.
Deftly does the dust express
In mind her hidden loveliness,
And from her cool silence stream
The cricket's cry and Dante's dream:
For the earth that breeds the trees
Breeds cities too, and symphonies,
Equally her beauty flows
Into a savior, or a rose—
Looks down in dream, and from above
Smiles at herself in Jesus' love.

Christ's love and Homer's art
Are but the workings of her heart;
Through Leonardo's hand she seeks
Herself, and through Beethoven speaks
In holy thunderings around
The awful message of the ground.

It is such simple divination that renews the promise of *The Human Fantasy*. Wheelock continues to regard life not as a moral puzzle, an example in rectitude, but as a flame, an experiment, "a beloved adventure." But he sees greater implications in it; his vista has grown broader. And it is still growing.

CHARLES ERSKINE SCOTT WOOD

GRENVILLE MELLEN, that early American lawyer, has been called "the poet that lives but in a single line." And that one illuminating line will persist as long as there are American anthologies. Charles Erskine Scott Wood, another lawyer, not usually rated as a poet, has printed only one book. Yet, when the critical history of American literature is compiled, that volume will occupy a significant if not a prominent place. It is not a work that lays any pretensions to importance; it is not even important-looking. There is no pompous preface, no self-adulating "radicalism" in any of its lines. Yet in these one hundred and twenty pages there is more clean vigor, vision and eloquence than in ninetenths of the "revolutionary" poetry that hails itself with the usual superlatives. The book is made up only of this one poem, which is little more than a dialog between a poet and Truth-a not too enticing scheme of argument. But this setting, which in the hands of most of our contemporaries would have quickly descended into an elaborate and dull symbolism, grows wider as the poem proceeds. Wood, with a social consciousness as intense as Giovannitti and a far greater command of language, is by turns violent and tender, soothing and incisive, florid and brusque. And under the most rhapsodic passages surges the directness of his passion, the challenge of revolution. This is how The Poet in the Desert (published by the author in Portland, Oregon, 1915) begins:

I have entered into the Desert, the place of desolation.

The Desert confronts me haughtily and assails me with solitude.

She sits on a throne of light,
Her hands clasped, her eyes solemnly questioning.
I have come into the lean and stricken land
Which fears not God, that I may meet my soul
Face to face, naked as the Desert is naked;
Bare as the great silence is bare.

I will question the Silent Ones who have gone before and are forgotten,
And the great host which shall come after,
By whom I also shall be forgot.
As the Desert is defiant unto all gods,
So am I defiant of all gods,
Shadows of Man cast upon the fog of his ignorance.
As a helpless child follows the hand of its mother,
So I put my hand into the hand of the Eternal.

Shortly after this introduction there is a description of the varying aspects of the desert. It is one of the most eloquent details in American poetry, a brilliant interlude of which this is a part:

She lights the Sun for a torch

And sets up the great cliffs as sentinels;
The morning and the evening are curtains before her chambers.
She displays the stars as her coronet.
She is cruel and invites victims,
Restlessly moving her wrists and ankles,
Which are loaded with sapphires.
Her brown breasts flash with opals.
She slays those who fear her,
But runs her hand lovingly over the brow of those who know her,
Soothing with a voluptuous caress.

She is a courtesan, wearing jewels, Enticing, smiling a bold smile;

Adjusting her brilliant raiment negligently,

Lying brooding upon her floor which is richly carpeted;

Her brown thighs beautiful and naked.

She toys with the dazzlery of her diadems,

Smiling inscrutably.

She is a nun, withdrawing behind her veil;

Gray, subdued, silent, mysterious, meditative, unapproachable.

She is fair as a goddess sitting beneath a flowering peachtree, beside a clear river.

Her body is tawny with the eagerness of the Sun.

And her eyes are like pools which shine in deep canyons.

She is beautiful as a swart woman, with opals at her throat, Rubies on her wrists and topaz on her ankles.

Her breasts are like the evening and the day stars;

She sits upon her throne of light, proud and silent, indifferent to her wooers.

The Sun is her servitor, the Stars are her attendants, running before her.

She sings a song unto her own ears, solitary, but it is sufficient.

It is the song of her being. . . .

She is like a jewelled dancer, dancing upon a pavement of gold;

Dazzling, so that the eyes must be shaded.

She wears the stars upon her bosom and braids her hair with the constellations.

This is not the speech one might have expected from Wood after reading the sharp and racy prose of his ironic "Heavenly Discourses" when they appeared in *The Masses*. But there is no less sharpness and an even deeper ironism in the colloquies between Truth and the Poet that form the greater part of the volume. Observe this impassioned outburst; a complete poem in itself with its controlled glorification:

I will not sing the ecstasy of the mother's birth-pang
Till Birth be free as Death;
Nor will I voice the nobility of Motherhood,
Till all motherhood be noble as Life itself.
I will sing a song of Bastards,
The free children of free mothers . . .
Oh, noble company of bastards,
Beloved of great Nature,
You are her petted children, born of her own desire;

You are her petted children, born of her own desire;
She has given you the stars for playthings and taught the winds to bring you offerings;

She has said to the sun these are your brothers, and to the moon these are your sisters;

She has lain close to you in your secret cradle and has whispered to you all the music of the unknown sanctuaries and has dangled before your eyes the pictures of the undiscovered world.

For you she has woven wreaths of bay And has crowned your brows with laurel; She has not delayed your coming for a priest's incantation; Nor held back the mystery of your creation Till the State give its consent.

She has not branded "Bastard" on your smooth, soft palms, Nor on the pink soles of your little feet.

The great Mother is ignorant and indifferent That you are baby breakers of the Law, And she laughs scornfully at the laws of the Rulers.

She has set her own brand upon your souls, And has given you place in the glorious company Of poets, musicians, painters, declarers of knowledge, Governors and captains, seers and conquerors;

William the Bastard, of Normandy,

And Alexander Hamilton, And the Great Deliverer, standing alone,

Sad; silent; rugged; like a storm-beaten spruce On a seaward cliff, melancholy; misunderstood of men, And infinitely patient.

Or pause before this direct and angry denunciation:

Let none ever say of me, "He was respectable."
The train-robber, the highwayman,
All those who boldly take and boldly kill,
And boldly tread the gallows' step,
Are kin unto Drake, Raleigh, Cortez, Villon, Cæsar,
Whose daring charmed the world.
But the fat-paunched robbers,
Who, from the safety of their leathern chairs,
Steal from the laborer his sweat,
And murder by law the thin-armed children,
Are venomous toads in the dark;
Clammy and without courage. They are respectable.

From this, Wood turns to bits of idyllic painting that are exquisite without the least trace of prettiness. Sometimes the idiom is definitely that of Whitman, sometimes that of the Bible; but Wood triumphs over a reminiscent music and what is prosy in some of the passages is lost in poignant evocations as thrilling as:

Behold the grass and the trees;
Do they think fearfully lest they offend
The grass and the trees of yester-year?
As the trees put out their blossoms,
So should Man blossom;
The apple-trees with their fruit,
And the locust-trees, which toss their blond curls
And seduce the breeze with honey.

What have I to do with the beauty of the morning and the evening

Or the enchantments of the seasons, Until the songs of those who possess their own souls be heard?

How shall I declare the singing of birds
Until everywhere there is laughter of children?
How shall I publish the march of Night
Until everywhere the breasts of the mothers

Are full for the children?
Shall I watch with delight
The whirling skirts of the Rain,
Which comes down the hills,
Flaunting her diaphanous draperies,
Or shall I be glad with the new-born buds
Which, before the palpitating bosom of Spring, weave veils
of verdure?

How can I, seeing Poverty, rejoice in the shrilling of grass-hoppers,

Crickets and cicadas, little unseen poets,
Which chant the passion of Summer,
Lying pale in the arms of overtaking Autumn?
Shall I concern myself with the distant stars
And the hushed murmur of the amorous leaves by night?
Shall I stand with young lovers in the enfolding darkness,
Or listen to the songs of lovers who beget new slaves?
I know that the wings of their love are broken.
I know that their love is defiled by priests.
Shall I shrill like the feeble voice of the katydid,
Or chirp a querulous tune,
Like a blackbird clinging to a cat-tail above a marsh,
While children are begotten of Poverty
On the dry breasts of mothers?

And here in the midst of passion and pain is a startling flash of sunrise:

The lean coyote, prowler of the night, Slips to his rocky fastnesses. Jack-rabbits noiselessly shuttle among the sage-brush, And, from the castellated cliffs, Rock-ravens launch their proud black sails upon the day. The wild horses troop back to their pastures.

The poplar-trees watch beside the irrigation-ditches.

Orioles, whose nests sway in the cotton-wood trees by the ditch-side, begin to twitter.

All shy things, breathless, watch

The thin, white skirts of dawn.

The dancer of the sky,

Who trips daintily down the distant mountain-side

Emptying her crystal chalice.

And a red-bird, dipped in sunrise, cracks from a poplar's top

His exultant whip above a silver world.

It is a volume of contrasts, but not of contradictions. The poem runs true to its theme; the disgust of tyranny, the opposition to hypocrisy; the bitter challenge to injustice is what impels these lines. I know of no more powerful protest than the passage in which Wood vehemently assails the slave-making machine, unless it is the one in which he ridicules the sapience and governing instinct of man. Here is a related fragment:

As a little child winking in its cradle,

I gaze up at the roof she has put over me;

I see it frosted with sparks of eternity.

It is forever beyond my finger reach and beautiful beyond my comprehension.

I do not seek to control it.

Yet I seek to control the soul of my brother,

Which also is inaccessible, infinite, beyond my comprehension.

I find no flaw in the marching of the worlds;

The unseen gathering of the crystal dew,

Or the raging of the relentless sea.

The glow-worms, which bear their lamps humbly,

As perfect as the sky-flooding moon.

The tempest which tears the rooted pillars of the world,

Not different from the wanton winds

Which negligently play their airy flutes upon the leaves.

Yet I instruct my mother.

Always, in spite of his disillusions, he is moved by the hope of the greater man, by the dream of a race

that lives not by codes and restrictions, but by the natural laws of beauty; a world existing beneficently in self-directed order, in a state of sublimated anarchy. This desire for a new system of things, for an unfettered but instinctively controlled freedom, prompts every mood. It sways Wood, whether it deals with the considerations of the State, or of a piece of fruit, or a celebration of self (recalling Oppenheim), or bastards, or the mockery of the stars, or profiteers, or the soft hiss of rain on summer leaves, or this graphic recollection of a round-up of an Indian encampment:

Even the little gray gophers sat erect and laughed at me. . . .

In that silent hour before the dawn,

When Nature drowses for a moment,

We swept, like fire, over the smoke-browned tee-pees, whose conical tops

Peeped above the willows, which unconcerned,

Whispered to the coquetting of the wind.

We frightened the air with the cackle of rifles, women's shrieks, children's screams, shrill yell of savages,

Hoarse curses of Christians.

The rifles chuckled continually;

A poor people, who asked nothing but freedom, butchered in the dark.

But the dawn would not linger, nor the slow-advancing day refuse to come;

The heartless larks saluted the morn, as if there had been no murder.

In the accusing light of the remorseless sun

It was not good to see the brown boys and girls lying about the grass in reckless repose

On their sides as if overcome with weariness:

On their backs, their arms thrown out carelessly;

Or drawn over their eyes, as if to shut out the light.

It was not good to see the fearful gateway

In the just-budding maiden bosom,
Whence startled Life had leaped to search the void;
And chubby babies, sleeping with a blue bullet-hole
In the innocent breast, the soft little belly.
Mothers, whose bosoms ran blood with the milk. . . .
They lay quiet in great dignity;
Their eyes staring at us, indifferent; almost contemptuous.

Passion and poetry—they are fused here. The fact that Art has again been invaded by a social force, and that it has yielded to a new influence without losing its own potency, is proved once more by this work. Wood never falters in his dual allegiance; poetry uplifts and glorifies his purpose. This blend grows more powerful as the poem comes to its triumphant climax; it reaches the heights of prophecy as it concludes:

The victims of the God of Gold
No longer march into his blood-dripping maw.
Their faces are set toward Death.
Their breasts are naked.
They have beaten their hammars and saws into knives.
Their eyes are fixed. They are willing to die.

Death is their drummer, drumming Upon the unknown graves of the oppressed.

At the front of the terrible army flaunt two great standards, Writhing like giant dragons above the sea of gray faces. On one is written, "Justice"; On the other, "Freedom."

They are written in blood.

The final sentence describes Wood's own lines. They rise from depths of a great passion. They are written in blood.

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BENÉT, BYNNER AND BRODY

It is something more than an easy alliteration that leads me to group these three young poets. They have in common, for all their material and technical differences, a peculiar blend of realism and symbolism that is unusual in American poetry. It is this combination that makes theirs what might be called a modern mysticism. an interpretation of the elemental in terms of the incidental. The title of William Rose Benét's latest book is an almost perfect illustration of the tendency, The Burglar of the Zodiac. Here the jeweled constellations, the starry treasures, the mystery of the planets' bright procession are brought down to our doors (or, to be more accurate, to our second-story) by "Red" Leary, the ambitious vegg and safe-cracker. But we can turn to Benét's first volume and find a similar impulse. Merchants from Cathay (The Century Co., 1913) this quality, which is amplified in his later volumes, is already in evidence. But it is no thin and sugary mysticism, no Maeterlinckéd sweetness long drawn out; it has a hearty and almost muscular power. The best examples of this mood are "The Anvil of Souls," with its robust swing. "Invulnerable" and "The Wrestlers." But it reaches its highest pitch in the almost riotous rhythms of the lusty ballads where Benét is at his best. This volume is full of the free and careless music that one rolls out sonorously on Winter evenings or hums while crossing a dusky field or tramping a road alone. The title-poem

is the epitome of this rollicking gaiety. A section follows:

How that they came.

Their heels slapped their bumping mules; their fat chaps glowed.

Glory unto Mary, each seemed to wear a crown!

Like sunset their robes were on the wide, white road:

So we saw those mad merchants come dusting into town.

Of their beasts. Two paunchy beasts they rode on and two they drove before.

May the Saints all help us, the tiger stripes they had! And the panniers upon them swelled full of stuffs and ore!

The square buzzed and jostled at a sight so mad.

And their boast.

They bawled in their beards, and their turbans they wried.

They stopped by the stalls with curvetting and clatter.

As bronze as the bracken their necks and faces dyed—And a stave they sat singing, to tell us of the matter.

With its Burthen, "For your silks to Sugarmago! For your dyes to Isfahan!

Weird fruits from the Isle o' Lamaree!

But for magic merchandise,

For treasure-trove and spice,

Here's a catch and a carol to the great, grand Chan,

The King of all the Kings across the sea!

Snatches like these shout from Benét's pages; they have the tone of Alfred Noyes' chanting combined with the buoyant nonsense of Lewis Carroll set by Vachel Lindsay. Or turn to a still earlier poem. Nine poets out of ten would have made "The Argo's Chanty" a wearisome list of forgotten incidents and half-remembered names. Given such a theme, they would have filled the lines with outworn classic phrases, heavy images, Bulfinch's Mythology and dullness ad lib. Benét does nothing of the sort. He does not hesitate to use Greek names with the rest of them, but in his sharp measures they do not remain names; they take on ruddy flesh, they glow once more with the thrill of their shining adventure. And even as names, hear how they call through the ringing stanzas that begin the poem:

Orpheus hath harped her,
Her prow hath drunk the sea,
Fifty haughty heroes at her golden rowlocks be!
His fingers sweep the singing strings,
Her forefoot white before she flings,
Out from the shore she strains—she swings—
And lifts, oh gallantly!

Orpheus shall harp for her,
The Talking Head speak wise for her,
Lynceus gaze sharp for her,
And Tiphys search the skies for her!
May Colchis curse the dawn o' day when first she
thundered free
And our golden captain Jason, in glory put to sea!

This vigor of utterance permeates most of Benét's work; it spurs his pen even when he is not engaged in the making of ballads. It surges beneath such quieter poems as "Paternity," the ironical and intricately rhymed "Remarks to the Back of a Pew"; the freshness of "His Ally," the tender strength of "Charms" and the fantastic "Morgiana Dances" in which swift movement is cleverly achieved. It makes us condone the instances where his borrowing is so unabashed. His love for Keats and Browning is so intense that occa-

sionally he cannot refrain from imitating them—even when he is conscious of it. But in the succeeding volume there is proportionately less of this assumption of other men's accents and far more of the poet's own personality.

In The Falconer of God (Yale University Press, 1914) the athletic mysticism grows. And with it grows a more fantastic sense of color and image. Benét has the gift of evoking a strange and spicy music from a combination of seemingly casual words. In this volume the blend of realism and romance is almost perfect. Interesting as was his earlier work, there was, beneath the bluster and buoyancy, something over-studious; hovering above the fresh aroma of his poems one caught, not infrequently, a whiff of midnight oil, slightly rancid. Now even the more obviously scholastic attempts show a sharpened participation, a livelier increase of life. Take, for example, the title-poem of the new book. Here is all of Benét's early glamor lifted to a higher plane of symbolism where it is sustained without ever being forced. These are the first two verses:

I flung my soul to the air like a falcon flying,
I said, "Wait on, wait on, while I ride below!
I shall start a heron soon

In the marsh beneath the moon—

A strange white heron rising with silver on its wings, Rising and crying

Wordless, wondrous things;

The secret of the stars, of the world's heart-strings
The answer to their woe.

Then stoop thou upon him, and grip and hold him so!"

My wild soul waited on as falcons hover. I beat the reedy fens as I tramped past.

I heard the mournful loon
In the marsh beneath the moon.
And then, with feathery thunder, the bird of my desire
Broke from the cover
Flashing silver fire.

High up among the stars I saw his pinions spire; The pale clouds gazed aghast

As my falcon stoopt upon him, and gript and held him fast.

Or take, as more pointed instances of this broadening of perceptions, the whimsical anger of "People," the macabre music of "The Cats of Cobblestone Street," the revealing freshness that animates the rather ponderous learning in "The Schoolroom of Poets," where we see the great singers, not as laurel-crowned bards, but as boys in class—pinched little Chatterton oblivious of the rest, Francis Thompson mumbling scraps of Latin, Keats deep in the charms of Marmontel's Peru. . . . Or turn to "The Stallion of Night," that striking conception that begins:

When the soft, gray-breasted Evening like a carrier-dove goes freed,

Cloaking the world with her wings as she floats from the hand of God.

Then sunset o'erstreameth heaven like the mane of a galloping steed,

And Man's soul is absorbed into Silence as water that seeps through the sod.

and ends:

Phantasmal—a vision—to vanish dislimned as a film from the sight?

Aye, dazed by such star-bright Heavens I must turn from their splendor soon.

Yet my heart may never banish this dream of the stallion of night

Who stamps at the fords of starlight, and neighs at the gates of the moon!

I am less enthusiastic about Benét when he sets out to tell a straight story. For one thing, it is never told in anything like a straightforward fashion; for another thing, it inevitably falls into the idiom of Browning. Such things as "The Vivandière" and "Café Tortoni, '81" move not only too slowly, but in a random, roundabout style that succeeds in nothing so much as tiring the reader. Not that they are unskilfully done; "Café Tortoni" is as good a composite picture of Édouard Manet, his theory of color, his surroundings and the state of his soul as could be drawn in three pages; it is an excellent synthesis. But it is not excellent poetry or fairly good poetry, or, for that matter, poetry at all. For one thing, the over-use of historical details retards rather than assists the progress of the verse; for another, the very regularity of the rhyme scheme (the repetition of a wearisome A, A, A, B, C, C, C, B) in so long a poem becomes jingling and detracts from the intellectual content.

Against this is the direct, clean-cut speech of "The Carpers," "The Laughing Woman" and "The Snob," the last of which I quote.

He said not even nothing very well.

After you spoke he reached and slammed a door
Within his mind . . . and ponderous silence fell.

There were few things his sneer could not ignore.

His talk was obvious and trite enough.

None missed it then, and no one ever will.

But it must puzzle God to "call his bluff"—

That horrible, complacent "keeping still"!

Some of the poems in this volume, some of the best poems, in fact, show an unfortunate tendency of Benét's -a tendency to be discursive and run on past the limitations of his themes. "The Land of the Giants" is a case in point. It is the sort of a half-physical, half-mystical ballad that this poet writes so well, a blend of light whimsy and loud protest. G. K. Chesterton, in one of his tremendous trifles, suggested, with his usual enthusiasm, that, since there are chanties for sailors, we should have a set of songs for shopmen, printers and bankers' clerks. In "The Land of the Giants" Benét has done even a more fascinating thing—he has written a marching song for reformers. But this ballad of Jack, the modern iconoclast, defying the ogres of tradition, would have been twice as appealing had it been only half as long. Benét excels in the shorter poems where he can curb his prancing imagination that so often runs away with him; it is particularly in the sonnet, where he is compelled to keep his restless steed curvetting inside the palings of fourteen lines, that he is most effective. Here his figures gain in definition and sharpness. In "The Pearl Diver" he speaks of

. . . the bright, bare Day Like a tall diver poised above the surge Of ebony night,

plunging through a spray of stars to pluck a filmy pearl

And held it high for earth and heaven to mark;— The cold globe of the winter-shrunken sun.

And here, in another sonnet, is this increased sharpness in a more poignant revelation:

THE MESSENGER

In a wild merriment of wind and bird God's gusty laughter swept me by but now Upon my desperate errand, wondering how Her heart would bear the truth, who ne'er had heard Death's sudden and irrevocable word. Yet all was light upon the upland brow. Rich golden acres, fruitful from the plough, Languished in light. The great sun smiled unstirred.

Then my heart raged against such cruel mirth. And to my lips there sprang a bitter cry.

"Would I were Samson, O thou mocking sky, To bring thee ruining to this careless earth! O proud and callous Beauty, flaunting by Blind to our agonies of death and birth!"

Benét's next volume is composed of one long poem interspersed with lyric interludes. The Great White Wall (Yale University Press, 1916) differs somewhat in kind but not in color from his previous volumes. Here is the same extraordinary sense of whimsy, a wayward fancy and a deft juggling with the grotesque. None of his compatriots, with the exception of Amy Lowell, Vachel Lindsay and his own brother, the young and amazingly talented Stephen Vincent Benét, has his flair for the decorative that verges on the diabolic. In the present work he has lightly turned back a few centuries and lets us revel with him in the savage glitter and shrill music of ancient True, there are times when, like Swinburne, Benét pulls his reader under as he sinks in a welter of flowing words and inundating figures; but he is a good swimmer, even in the roughest verbal seas. One pictures him, having just plunged through an especially threatening passage; his feet firm but swaying a trifle on the shore; his head thrown back victoriously, still dripping phrases like:

And Timur Khan who overran the palace of the murdered Khan

Our Lord plucked writhing from the throne, thrust off his treacherous friends,

And scourged the Jetes to howl and flee. Kings bound their loins in fealty,

All city chiefs, all nomad tribes to Tartary's farthest ends.

He razed the ramparts of Systan and smote the lords of Badukshan,

Whose chepaval and shekaval, wild squadrons, he outrode. Polonians, barbarians, Udecelains, Hungarians

He gripped and threw, and on to new and vaster triumphs strode.

The poet is rarely as rumbling and unintelligible as this. Often he achieves, in the midst of such merely mouthfilling rhymes, a piercing lyrical note. And never does his vivacity or his invention flag. The end where terrible Timur sees his great defeat in the hour of his greatest triumph is a skilful, dramatic climax. The poetic narrative of *The Great White Wall* is another proof of Benét's varying and colorful convictions.

In The Burglar of the Zodiac (Yale University Press, 1918), Benét's latest volume, the poet begins to let his fantastic Pegasus run away and frequently unseat him. He seems either afraid or incapable of using the bit. The result is that often what started out as a canter among the stars ends in a scraping of shins on the pebbly earth. One watches this in such poems as the over-long allegory, "The Seventh Pawn," "The Quick-Lunch Counter" and "The Blackamoor's Pantomime." There are many times when the rhythms are badly cramped and the rhymes

seem twisted and tortured. But all the poet's earlier gifts are combined with a wealth of new energy in the madcap title-poem, in "Films" (particularly the first and third reels) and "The Horse Thief." This last is a prodigal extravaganza that is as lovely as it is lively. A desperate cowboy, crouching with coiled lariat in the mesquite, sees a snow-white horse, whose mane is mixed with moonlight and silver. He lassos the bright mustang: the rope breaks; he manages to swing up and hold to its glittering mane. Then, as the horse springs from the earth, he hears "a monstrous booming like a thunder of flapping sails," the mustang spreads wings-and he realizes he has caught Pegasus! . . . But the first poem is also the best example of what Benét can rise to. Here is possibly less of the impudent, soaring vivacity, but more of a homelier vision. "The Singing Skyscrapers" has the rich combination of daring and nobility toward which Benét's work seems to aim. In the voices of the titanic buildings calling each other across the night, we hear a new sort of mysticism—one that, with its blend of splendor and stridency, is wholly American. It is impossible to imagine such a conception coming from a graduate of Oxford. The fancy itself is inconceivable except from one to whom skyscrapers are as intimate as quick-lunch counters, crap-games, Long Island unicorns and Douglas Fairbanks-all of which make up the chief part of his most recent volume. Here is a fragment from the initial poem:

And from far to the South
I heard the Woolworth Tower
Reply from the sky:

"Aye, cities of power, Each a granite flower Stamened to unfold With towers of ivory, Towers of gold, Towers of brass And towers of iron: Towers as many as the hours that environ The years of our servitude, Our steel and iron yoke. In the deep blue skies They stand like smoke! Pavia the hundred-towered, Shining over Italy, The Greek Heliopolis, The City of the Sun— Phoenician Sidon, Persian Persepolis, The Vale of Siddim's cities By sins undone! There the strong rampires Of Troy flare fires. There like spears stand spires. Priceless citadels Pulsate with their pacan Aeon after aeon: 'We are the eternal. Your frame but shells! We are your sires, The frozen fierce desires Of Man made immortal By temple-miracles!"

Or, for a more obviously American quality, turn to "Down Along the Mountain" (from "Films") and notice the insinuating mixture of insolent ragtime and reverential intimacy. Here is a bright snatch of it:

"Hang
your
spurs
On the back-door of the rainbow!

Bow
to
Gawd
In the great big sky corral!
Hitch your britches, and amble to the ranch-house!
Sail in, Davy—sail in, Davy—
Sail in, Davy!
You're bound to get that gal!"...

Waving a red serape, the wild vaquero wind Fled through the fiery sunset, with phantom herds behind. Bellowing loud and lowing with Spring's wild loco-weed The galloping herds of sunset passed in a mad stampede!

Witter Bynner is a poet who has always been promising greater things than he has ever given. In the early An Ode to Harvard and Other Poems (Small, Maynard & Co., 1907) there were several hints of what one might expect; in The New World (Mitchell Kennerley, 1915) the possibilities were repeated and amplified. But it is in Grenstone Poems (Frederick A. Stokes, 1917) that he fulfils at least part of his promise. The desire for democracy, the same vision rising from what is crude and casual that was in his previous work, is here with a finer restraint and a riper artistry. Bynner has found not only a sense of life, but a synthesis of it. Having found it, however, he keeps on discovering and rediscovering it with the same steady surprise and, unfortunately, almost the same speeches. This continued insistence on what, when first confided, was fresh and startling becomes redundant and unexciting when repeated some score of times. Bynner too often puts down what he thinks he ought to write rather than what he actually feels. genuinely uplifted poems are obscured by much that is merely competent and often commonplace. There is little excuse for so many flat and feeble verses on the order of "Lullaby," "A Grenstone Glade," "War" and "Responses," with its concluding bathetic quatrain:

What can a man descry in us
And so allow the lie in us? . . .
The serpent and the dove in us—
And O, the mother-love in us.

But against this we have the calm passion of "The Poet"; the dextrous charm of "Young Eden"; the sonorous music of "During a Chorale by Cesar Franck"; the colloquial ease of "Train Mates," which begins:

Outside hove Shasta, snowy height on height, A glory; but a negligible sight, For you had often seen a mountain-peak But not my paper. So we came to speak. . . .

A smoke, a smile,—a good way to commence The comfortable exchange of difference!—You a young engineer, five feet eleven, Forty-five chest, with football in your heaven, Liking a road-bed newly built and clean, Your fingers hot to cut away the green Of brush and flowers that bring beside a track The kind of beauty steel lines ought to lack,—And I a poet, wistful of my betters, Reading George Meredith's high-hearted letters.

In a dozen places we find his early lyric power, although it is usually tuned to a philosophic lute; we have here the physical merged and sometimes swamped in the metaphysical. Often, indeed, the mysticism is a bit self-conscious; the rhapsodist becomes too publicly aware of the sacredness of his mission. We get the best and worst of this mood in such a poem as

GOD'S ACRE

Because we felt there could not be
A mowing in reality
So white and feathery-blown and gay
With blossoms of wild caraway,
I said to Celia, "Let us trace
The secret of this pleasant place!"
We knew some deeper beauty lay
Below the bloom of caraway,
And when we bent the white aside
We came to paupers who had died:
Rough wooden shingles row on row
And God's name written there—John Doe.

There are occasions, and not a few of them, when Bynner tosses off a natural and skilfully modulated song with artless fluency. Frequently he reaches the high notes of poetry without effort or gasping for breath. And though there are instances where the spirit of "The Shropshire Lad" overpowers this poet, he has a spirit of his own and many melodies to express it. Witness "Lest I Learn," or "The Dead Loon," or "To No One in Particular," or "To a Phoebe Bird," or this melodious movement called

CHARIOTS

I never saw the morning till to-day;
I never knew how soon night went away—
Day merely came a regular event;
Night merely went. . . .

Now day and night are chariots for me, Since I have learned their mystery from you: Day holding one and moving solemnly— Night holding two.

Alter Brody, the youngest of the trio, has just appeared on the literary firmament. His youth and his frankness have combined to keep him from regular appearance in the public prints. And yet his first volume, with its uncompromising fidelity to life and its eager faith in some beauty beneath and beyond it, establishes him as a significant contributor to the new spirit in our verse. A Family Album (B. W. Huebsch, 1918), there is a sincerity and sensitivity so keen that they seem to possess not only the soul but the blood and bones of poetry. Still in his early twenties, Brody responds to both the influences of what he remembers of Russia and what he has seen in America. He sets off the mysticism of one with the sharp mechanism of the other. And he does this with an intensity that is both racial and individual; a strength that is personal and is increased as it catches up the accents of a people.

In this collection, what racial significance the poems have is usually unconscious. And yet even in the poems that do not deal directly with Jewish characters or memories, there is a definitely Semitic undertone—that queer blend of love and hate, of brutality and tenderness, of a great scorn and a greater pity. It is this Hebraic quality that makes his lines seem to leap hotly from the cold black and white of the printed page. Notice, as one of a number of illuminating examples, this poignant picture with its dramatic and half-withheld climax:

LAMENTATIONS

In a dingy kitchen
Facing a ghetto backyard,
An old woman is chanting Jeremiah's Lamentations,
Quaveringly,
Out of a Hebrew Bible.

The gaslight flares and falls . . .

Tonight,
Two thousand years ago,
Jerusalem fell and the Temple was burnt.
Tonight,
This white-haired Jewess,
Sits in her kitchen and chants—by the banks of the
Hudson—
The Lament of the Prophet.

The gaslight flares and falls . . .

Nearby,
Locked in her room,
Her daughter lies on a bed convulsively sobbing.
Her face is dug in the pillows;
Her shoulders heave with her sobs.
The bits of a photograph lie on the dresser.

Everywhere in this volume, in spite of certain crude immaturities, one sees the impress of a fecund and original mind, of imagination fed by strengthening fact, of sight that is sharpened by insight. This pungency is seldom absent, but it is possibly most clearly to be seen in those poems where Brody suggests a lively participation in city life and, at the same time, an apparent detachment from it.

GHETTO TWILIGHT

An infinite weariness comes into the faces of the old tenements

As they stand massed together on the block

Tall and thoughtfully silent

In the enveloping twilight.

Pensively

They eye each other across the street

Through their dim windows;

With a sad, recognizing stare,
Watching the red glow fading in the distance
At the end of the street
Behind the black church spires;
Watching the vague sky lowering overhead
Purple with clouds of colored smoke
From the extinguished sunset;
Watching the tired faces coming home from work,
Like dry-breasted hags
Welcoming their children to their withered arms.

Or witness the graphic yet glamorous drawing of "Across the Yard," the sympathetic delineation in "In the Circulating Library," the picturesque "Cross Streets," which has the precision of the Imagists and far more fervor than most of them ever achieve, and which begins

I love to watch them as I pass by them on the street car—Rambling away from the avenue between blocks of tall tenements

That brood over them from both sides

Like old market women;

Or stealing mysteriously through long, low brown-stone blocks at night,

Between trees and porches and lamplights-

Lonely lamplights retreating behind each other on their posts.

Or turn, for further exemplification of this power, to the longer and more discursive poems. It is in the more extended passages that most poets, especially the younger ones, exhibit their philosophic foibles and, incidentally, their weaknesses. But Brody does not often betray himself by falling into stodginess or verbosity; he skates over the thin ice with mocking ease. Under the abstractions and egotism of the "Soliloquy of a Realist" there is the personal vigor and street-flavored talk that lifts

the poem above vanity and argument. But it is in his pictures that Brody is most persuasive; his edged descriptions of city scenes with their sharp commentaries are surpassed only by such sketches as Sandburg's. Even when the note is softer it is no less stern; he never descends to the sentimentalities that hang about the subject.

A FUNERAL: ITALIAN QUARTER

Someone is dead . . .

With an intermittent wail,
The music rises at each corner,
As the band blares out the strain—
Poignantly rises and falls,
Like a sharp-crested wave
Breaking wearily against the stone tenements
Like the sigh of an invisible sword
Cleaving through the air,
Up and down.
Someone is dead . . .
Like a row of black beetles
The coaches crawl after the deck'd hearse,
Through the narrow gully of the street, banked by brooding

tenements, Slowly, monotonously filing

Into the boisterous breadth of the Avenue, under the harshrumbling Elevated—

The coachmen crack their whips and the horses strain forward;

And the music strikes a shriller, wilder key,

Struggling desperately to assert itself in the multi-mouthed tumult.

Someone is dead . .

In the garland-decked hearse he is lying,

In the garland-decked hearse, within the carved casket, Reposing royally.

Yesterday he was a hewer of wood and a carrier of coal, Bending under his endless burdens on endless stairs.

Now he is riding in a garland-decked hearse, within a carved casket,

In fine linen—bathed and washed at last—

Guarded by four angels in livery!

Thus, in one volume by a boy of twenty-two, we have a variegated, strangely assembled and yet somehow synthesized work. Much of this is an interpretation of industrial activity against a background of ancient dreams; young America seen through the eyes of old Russia. Witness "Kartúshkiya-Beróza" (possibly the most beautiful individual poem, but too long to quote), which is, in microcosm, a whole Russian-Jewish boyhood; "Times Square," where one world impinges on another; the mixed tenderness and irony of "Ma"; the remarkable title-poem, "A Family Album," with its vivid features, and "The Neurological Institute," a sort of Spoon River Anthology of the East Side. The memory of the ghetto haunts this volume; even Broadway takes on the quality of a seething Judengasse.

There is, let me hasten to add, no attempt at reconstruction here. Brody offers no panaceas, no partisan pronouncements; he attempts no propaganda. He is content to record the interplay of environment and heredity, to fix the moment when the fact blossoms into fantasy, to follow the line between realism and rapture. He pierces the superficial aspect of his subjects and goes deep, turning away from nothing that is raw or unpleasant. He does not reject what is usually concealed, knowing that ugliness is as inextricably knit with life as beauty; his poetry seems striving to find the point where what is ugly can be balanced and finally fused with the whole.

These occasional discords and suspensions are not only natural, but necessary in any work that purports to be a rendering of truth. "Art," this poet seems to summarize, "is not only a record, but a harmonizing of dissonances."

This is what gives Brody's lines such vitality. A dozen poems illustrate his gift of making a picture and then, with a slight turn of phrase, making it come to life. Observe "The Deserted Church," "A City Park," "The Old Courtesan," and "November," to cite four utterly dissimilar examples. Here is the last named:

I

Fearlessly,
They thrust their dry branches against the sky;
Long since the wind rifled their blossoms
And scattered their foliage on the ground—
Now they stand sternly erect,
Naked and strong,
Having nothing to lose.

П

They strew the ground,
Drifting into long, shallow banks,
Piling into deep red mounds,
Eddying under the trees
Aimlessly—
Long since the winter wilted them with its breath
And tore them from their twigs.
Now they are free,
Having no need to grow.

We have in each of these the sharp word, the vivid image fused and fired by something warmer and more vivifying than theories of art. It is a personal magic

Alter Brody

261

that pervades these young and passionate pages—a magic that has its roots in mysticism, but flowers in the calm air of everyday. If America is indeed an amalgam of ideas, arts and races, the melting-pot theory has in the groping and responsive work of Alter Brody one of its most convincing proofs.

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SARA TEASDALE AND THE LYRICISTS

THE poetry of our living Americans, it may be gathered from the foregoing chapters, can criticize social conditions, paint a picture, analyze a community, put forward theories in matters of art and the new psychology, dissect the past and direct the future. Yet those who grant its accomplishment in such matters have wondered whether, in the efforts to widen its power, it has not lost the very power which gave poetry its original impetus. Can it, they ask, with an inflection that is too dubious to be genuinely anxious, express the simple and elemental emotions; can it sing? The answer may be found not only in the sonant work of men like Wheelock, Lindsay, Bynner, Carman, Johns, Neihardt; it is in the long rows of volumes that sing themselves into new editions every Spring and Autumn. Consider only the feminine lyricists. At once one is confronted by a staggering array; their works alone would fill a Carnegie Library for feminists. Offhand one calls to mind Sara Teasdale. Anna Hempstead Branch, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Zoë Akins, Lizette Woodworth Reese, Harriet Monroe, Margaret Widdemer, Eunice Tietjens, Edith Wyatt, Mary Carolyn Davies, Amelia Josephine Burr, Louise Imogene Guiney, Jessie B. Rittenhouse. Muna Lee, Olive Tilford Dargan, Grace Hazard Conkling, Angela Morgan, Marguerite Wilkinson. Another dozen could be summoned easily. And, in their frankness, their directness of expression, their use of a distinctly national idiom, most of them are

definitely American singers, not tuneful echoes of melodists overseas.

There are, of course, half a hundred more minstrels in these States who please the populace with their amiable tinklings. But these have scarcely a transient claim on our attention. Written around respectable rhymes and irreproachable sentiments, their lines are full of a simpering regularity; they suggest a melody that somehow is not music. They remind one of nothing so much as an air by Chaminade played on a metronome. Or, when they attempt fortissimo effects, of the song of the sirens played on a steam calliope. Such familiar blatancies need not detain us; they are evanescent space-fillers and trade goods that are no more related to poetry than they are to immortality. The work of the poets mentioned in the preceding paragraph is lyricism of an entirely different caliber. In taking care of the sounds, these singers have not neglected to look after the sense. Their stanzas are as intellectually candid as they are lyrically refreshing.

No one of these word-musicians has more completely and melodiously mastered her craft than Sara Teasdale, possibly the most gifted singer of them all. With the utmost simplicity of phrase and style, she achieves effects that are little short of magical; her stanzas, usually without a single figure of speech, are more eloquent than a poem crammed with gorgeous tropes and highly colored similes. This utterance which, as Miss Teasdale's schooling has proceeded, has grown less and less studied, is already recognizable among many echoes in the early Sonnets to Dusé and Other Poems (Richard G. Badger, 1907). But in Helen of Troy and Other Poems (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1911) it is far stronger. And yet, excellent as are many of the short poems, Miss Teasdale

has not attained her full singing power in this volume; her songs are surpassed by the six monologs that open the book. Helen of Troy, Beatrice, Sappho, Marianna Alcoforando (the Portuguese nun), Guenevere, Erinna ("pale Erinna of the perfect lyre," Sappho's favorite pupil)—these are all made to live in a blank verse so musical that it has an almost lyric intensity. Classical in subject, the treatment is as modern and searching as any of Oppenheim's analytic probings; the figures are vitalized by a new interpretation that is as penetrating as it is passionate. The picture of Sappho grown old, singing her little daughter to sleep and dreaming of her old loves and Lesbos, is unusual and unforgettable—particularly in its half-pathetic, half-ironic ending:

Ah, Love that made my life a lyric cry, Ah, Love that tuned my lips to lyres of thine, I taught the world thy music, now alone I sing for one who falls asleep to hear.

And this is the illuminating opening of "Erinna":

They sent you in to say farewell to me.
No, do not shake your head; I see your eyes
That shine with tears. Sappho, you saw the sun
Just now when you came hither, and again,
When you have left me, all the shimmering
Great meadows will laugh lightly, and the sun
Put round about you warm invisible arms
As might a lover, decking you with light.
I go toward darkness, tho' I lie so still.

The volume is full of this impulsive beauty, a delicate spontaneity that, concerning itself little with poetic fashions and theories of form, proceeds directly from the heart rather than the head. I do not mean by this that

Miss Teasdale's lyrics are without intellectual content. On the contrary, there are many poems that owe much of their appeal to the dexterity of their turns, to an idea that is downright clever in its conception, to the twist in a last line that puts one in mind of a subtler and undramatic O. Henry. One sees this even in so early and facile a lyric as

THE SONG MAKER

I made a hundred little songs
That told the joy and pain of love,
And sang them blithely, tho' I knew
No whit thereof.

I was a weaver deaf and blind; A miracle was wrought for me, But I have lost my skill to weave Since I can see.

For while I sang—ah swift and strange!

Love passed and touched me on the brow.

And I who made so many songs

Am silent now.

In her next volume, Rivers to the Sea (The Macmillan Co., 1915), this epigrammatic adroitness is emphasized. And it is accompanied by a greater freedom and skill. Witness, for instance, a poem like "Spring," with its concluding

Give over, we have laughed enough;
Oh dearest and most foolish friend,
Why do you wage a war with love
To lose your battle in the end?

Or observe how this intellectual stimulus is combined with a passionate sincerity in "Joy," in "After Love,"

in "The Answer," in "The Poor House" and possibly most hauntingly in such a natural and unaffected piece of music as:

When I am dead and over me bright April
Shakes out her rain-drenched hair,
Tho' you should lean above me broken-hearted,
I shall not care.

I shall have peace, as leafy trees are peaceful When rain bends down the bough; And I shall be more silent and cold-hearted Than you are now.

Direct, eager, without ostentation or ornament, her lines move with a potency of their own. Sparing of metaphors, almost sparse in their clear expressiveness, these poems, usually limiting themselves to two or three simple quatrains, contain more sheer singing than those of any other living American poet. Miss Teasdale has a genius for the song, for the pure lyric in which words seem to have fallen into place without art or effort. Consider such frequent and flawless snatches as "The Flight," "Swans," "A Prayer," "Enough," "The Answer," "Capri" and this

NIGHT SONG AT AMALFI

I asked the heaven of stars
What I should give my love—
It answered me with silence,
Silence above.

I asked the darkened sea

Down where the fishers go—
It answered me with silence,
Silence below.

Oh, I could give him weeping,
Or I could give him song—
But how can I give silence
My whole life long?

These poems, clean-cut and eloquent, are like nothing so much as rhymed Tanagras. They have the same delicacy of design, strength of outline and charm of gesture as those exquisite figurines. And, what is more, they have the same simplicity in their sharpness of execution and appeal. It is a simplicity, however, that is not always as naïve as it seems to be; and Miss Teasdale's very sophistication saves the volume from an impending musical monotony. There are indeed several occasions where the player seems harping on a rather frayed and outworn string; lacking the intensive thrill, the love-song that should have lifted up its hearers falls heavily and flat. One notices this in the repetition of her minor moods, when her grief seems only a medium by which an effect is achieved, when she seems to be trying to grip an emotion instead of being in the grip of one. One often hears a fine modulation instead of a piercing outcry; an anguish that is less passionate than pretty—sometimes even a trifle pat.

> For him the happiness of light, For me a delicate despair.

This "delicate despair" is likely to be Miss Teasdale's handicap. It is one of the two things that can easily degenerate into a pattern. The other is the poet's overfrequent identification of herself with Nature, its creatures and its various manifestations. This "veryfraternal-with-the-elements" attitude (I quote Jack Collings Squire's serviceable phrase) is effective once in

Sara Teasdale

a while, but it soon becomes a mannerism as tiresome as any repeated cliché. It grows especially wearisome after a set series of "I am the pool of blue," "I am the still rain falling," "I am the river," "I was a child of the shining meadow," "I am a cloud," "I was a sister of the sky," "I am the brown bird pining," etc. . . . It is a careless dependence on a stock pattern of poetry, a lyrical laziness into which Miss Teasdale does not often fall. Her work usually maintains itself on the high level sounded in her occasional sapphics, in the blank verse "From the Sea," which is as thrilling as any of her lyrics and as lyric as any of her songs, and in the quiet poem that opens the volume with its note of personal hunger:

Oh, is it not enough to be Here with this beauty over me? My throat should ache with praise, and I Should kneel in joy beneath the sky. Oh, beauty are you not enough? Why am I crying after love With youth, a singing voice and eyes To take earth's wonder with surprise? Why have I put off my pride, Why am I unsatisfied: I, for whom the pensive night Binds her cloudy hair with light, I, for whom all beauty burns Like incense in a million urns? Oh, beauty, are you not enough? Why am I crying after love?

Her most recent volume, Love Songs (The Macmillan Co., 1917), is a gathering of her old amatory verses, a few new ones and a lovely interlude, "Songs out of Sorrow." This collection emphasizes again how bare

of verbal subtleties and startling images her verses are, and yet how full of a deeper magic they seem. Glance at the new poems for a renewed verification; observe "Barter," "Refuge," "The Tree of Song." Slight though many of the lyrics are, they are seldom trivial and never commonplace. Theirs is an artlessness that is something of an art; the flimsiest of surfaces conceals an alert and often adroit mentality. Some of these love-songs, however, are less frank and genuine than one has a right to expect from Miss Teasdale. They rise from a desire to please rather than a necessity to create; they are impelled by the mood of literary romance, of faded roses, moonlight, lilies, trellised balconies, plaintive mandolins; a mood that is not so much erotic as Pierrotic.

Pierrot stands in the garden
Beneath a waning moon,
And on a lute he fashions
A fragile silver tune.

Pierrot plays in the garden, He thinks he plays for me, But I am quite forgotten Under the cherry tree.

Pierrot plays in the garden, And all the roses know That Pierrot loves his music,— But I love Pierrot.

Nothing, of course, is as reckless and wildly fantastic as the adventure of love. But nothing is so stereotyped, so bald and banal as a detailed description of it. The usual book of love-songs is worse than a surfeit of

sweets; it is a box of marshmallows flavored with rose-water, sugar spread over treacle, the song of a night-ingale "arranged" by Reginald de Koven. Yet this book, like the anthology edited by Miss Teasdale, The Answering Voice, contains almost a hundred love-songs and not more than a dozen are sententious or cloying. For the greater part Miss Teasdale fulfils her promise; she gives us the lyric in its most concise and chiseled form; she responds to the passion of beauty that is, for all its disguises and evasions, as energetic as the passion for life.

It would seem difficult to find a less literary language than Miss Teasdale's, yet in the poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay one finds an even more untutored simplicity accompanying an indefinable magic. Because of her very naïveté, her pages vibrate with a direct and often dramatic power that few of our most expert craftsmen can equal. Turn to the title-poem of Renascence and Other Poems (Mitchell Kennerley, 1917), a poem written when Miss Millay was still in her 'teens, and observe how amazingly it combines a spiritual eloquence with a cool, colloquial lucidity. It begins, like a child's aimless verse or a counting-out rhyme:

All I could see from where I stood Was three long mountains and a wood; I turned and looked another way, And saw three islands in a bay. So with my eyes I traced the line Of the horizon, thin and fine, Straight around till I was come Back to where I'd started from; And all I saw from where I stood Was three long mountains and a wood.

An almost inconsequential opening but, as the poem proceeds, one with a haunting and cumulative effect.

Over these things I could not see These were the things that bounded me

it goes on. And then, without ever losing the straightforwardness of the couplets, it begins to mount. There is an exquisite idyllic passage beginning

The grass, a-tiptoe at my ear,
Whispering to me I could hear;
I felt the rain's cool finger-tips
Brush tenderly across my lips,
Laid gently on my sealed sight,
And all at once the heavy night
Fell from my eyes and I could see,—
A drenched and dripping apple-tree,
A last long line of silver rain. . . .

And suddenly, beneath the descriptive rapture, one is confronted by a greater revelation. Mystery becomes articulate. It is as if a child playing about the room had, in the midst of prattling, uttered some shining and terrific truth. This remarkable poem is in parts a trifle repetitious, but what it repeats is said so pointedly and, for all its obvious youth, so profoundly that one thinks of scarcely any lesser poet than Blake as one begins the ascending climax:

O God, I cried, no dark disguise
Can e'er hereafter hide from me
Thy radiant identity!
Thou canst not move across the grass
But my quick eye will see Thee pass,
Nor speak, however silently,
But my hushed voice will answer Thee.

I know the path that tells Thy way Through the cool eve of every day; God, I can push the grass apart And lay my finger on Thy heart!

The entire poem commands one not merely by its precocious power but by its sheer lyrical mastery.

A few pages later, Miss Millay sounds this same love of earth in an even brighter and more condensed ecstasy. None of our poets has ever communicated rapture more smitingly than she has in

GOD'S WORLD

O world, I cannot hold thee close enough!

Thy winds, thy wide grey skies!

Thy mists that roll and rise!

Thy woods, this autumn day, that ache and sag And all but cry with color! That gaunt crag

To crush! To lift the lean of that black bluff!

World, World, I cannot get thee close enough!

Long have I known a glory in it all,

But never knew I this;

Here such a passion is

As stretcheth me apart.—Lord, I do fear

Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year;

My soul is all but out of me,—let fall

No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

In her more austere and formal lines, Miss Millay is almost as authoritative. Genius, not a mere pretty talent, burns through them. Her sonnets, with the phrasing cut down to the glowing core, exhibit the same sensitive parsimony that one finds in the best of the Imagist poems plus a far richer sense of human values. Here is the first of the four exquisite unnamed sonnets;

one that has, like "Renascence," a mixture of world sadness and a painful hunger for beauty—a hunger so intense that no delight seems great enough to give her peace.

Thou art not lovelier than lilacs,—no
Nor honeysuckle; thou art not more fair
Than small white single poppies. I can bear
Thy beauty; though I bend before thee, though
From left to right, not knowing where to go,
I turn my troubled eyes, nor here nor there
Find any refuge from thee; yet I swear
So has it been with mist,—with moonlight so.

Like him who day by day unto his draught
Of delicate poison adds him one drop more
Till he may drink unharmed the death of ten,
Even so, inured to beauty, who have quaffed
Each hour more deeply than the hour before,
I drink—and live—what has destroyed some men.

Elsewhere (as in "The Suicide") the tone is more derivative and disillusioned. The idiom is less personal; the results of reading begin to show. In "Interim" there is an intrusion of foreign accents; echoes of other dramatic monologs disturb one as the poem wanders off into periods of reflection and rhetoric. And there are several pages where all that was fresh and native to this young poet seems turned to a mere imitation of "Ashes of Life" and "The Little Ghost" prettiness. are sweet lispings that might have emanated from many a talented undergraduate. The inclusion of such merely pleasant pieces is all the more surprising when one notes the inexplicable omission of "Journey," a youthful poem, but one sharpened and illuminated by a succession of brilliant and memorable touches. Here is a part of it:

Cat-birds call
Through the long afternoon, and creeks at dusk
Are guttural. Whip-poor-wills wake and cry,
Drawing the twilight close about their throats;
Only my heart makes answer. Eager vines
Go up the rocks and wait; flushed apple-trees
Pause in their dance and break the ring for me. . . .
Round-faced roses, pink and petulant,
Look back and beckon ere they disappear.

No doubt this, as well as other notable verse, will make her next volume distinctive. But whatever the second volume contains, *Renascence* alone assures her a high place among American lyrists.

Zoë Akins is another who expresses herself in direct and certain stanzas. Her gift is essentially dramatic; she has, even in her lyrics (and there sometimes to her detriment), a strong sense of the theater. Her first volume of poems, anticipating the skilful plays she wrote subsequently, reveals her preoccupation with the stage not alone in its eulogies of various performers but in such theatrical performances as "The Princess Dances," "The King's Kiss," "Empire d'Amour" and a few other gushing immaturities. But *Interpretations* (Mitchell Kennerley, 1914) also reveals a quality of singing unsurpassed by only a few of her contemporaries. In poems like "This Is My Hour" and "The Tragedienne" she rises to a lyric intensity that reaches its summit in this compelling song:

I am the wind that wavers, You are the certain land; I am the shadow that passes Over the sand.

I am the leaf that quivers, You—the unshaken tree; You are the stars that are steadfast, I am the sea.

You are the light eternal,
Like a torch I shall die . . .
You are the surge of deep music,
I—but a cry!

Her blank verse retains much of this music. Sonorous without running into mere sound, the opening trilogy of poems, "Mary Magdalen," is something more than a poetic echo of Heyse's. This Mary seems, especially in the first section, a sort of half-sister to Salome and a cousin to Evelyn Inness. But I can think of few figures as vivid and eloquent as the Mary of the second part, the contradictory figure in "On the Mount." This poem and "The Sisterhood" show Miss Akins at her psychological best. The last-mentioned study (which has for its motto Balzac's line "The life of every woman is one of three tragedies-celibacy, marriage or unchastity") is the work of an arresting and speculative mind: the section "The Wife," more than the others, is deeply compelling, proceeding to its natural and noble close like the slow sweep of an orchestral elegy.

In the work of Anna Hempstead Branch we encounter a lyricist of entirely different temperament. She is not a fanciful singer but a philosophizing one. Often, indeed, her ruminations lead her into long and circuitous divagations; she weighs down her simple melodies with mysticism and overintellectualizes what should have been a brief passage on the harp. This too-determined emphasis on the symbolic and the sermonizing interferes

seriously with her natural beauty of expression. It almost ruins one of Miss Branch's finest and best-known poems; after a direct and excellent opening, she heads toward philosophic generalities, drops into platitudes and ends on a note of Christmas card moralizing. Here is the first and memorable half of "To a New York Shop-Girl Dressed for Sunday":

To-day I saw a shop-girl go Down gay Broadway to meet her beau.

Conspicuous, splendid, conscious, sweet, She spread abroad and took the street.

And all that niceness would forbid, Superb, she smiled upon and did.

Let other girls, whose happier days Preserve the perfume of their ways,

Go modestly. The passing hour Adds splendor to their opening flower.

But from this child too swift a doom Must steal her prettiness and bloom,

Toil and weariness hide the grace That pleads a moment from her face.

So blame her not if, for a day, She flaunts her glories while she may.

She half perceives, half understands, Snatching her gifts with both her hands.

The little strut beneath the skirt That lags neglected in the dirt,

The indolent swagger down the street— Who can condemn such happy feet!

Innocent! vulgar—that's the truth! Yet with the darling wiles of youth!

The bright, self-conscious eyes that stare With such hauteur, beneath such hair! Perhaps the men will find me fair!

Charming and charmed, flipppant, arrayed, Fluttered and foolish; proud, displayed, Infinite pathos of parade!

In The Shoes That Danced (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1905), from which these verses are taken, Miss Branch frequently attains a high level of lyricism. And when her intellectuality is restrained or condensed in the confines of the sonnet, she is more than usually eloquent. Here are the first few verses of one of her loveliest songs:

Oh, grieve not, ladies, if at night Ye wake to feel your beauty going. It was a web of frail delight, Inconstant as an April snowing.

In other eyes, in other lands, In deep fair pools, new beauty lingers, But like spent water in your hands It runs from your reluctant fingers.

Ye shall not keep the singing lark
That owes to earlier skies its duty.
Weep not to hear along the dark
The sound of your departing beauty.

The fine and anguished ear of night
Is tuned to hear the smallest sorrow.
Oh, wait until the morning light!
It may not seem so gone to-morrow!

And here is a sonnet that is rich in personal value as well as poetic revelation:

Sometimes when all the world seems gray and dun And nothing beautiful, a voice will cry, "Look out, look out! Angels are drawing nigh!" Then my slow burdens leave me, one by one, And swiftly does my heart arise and run Even like a child, while loveliness goes by—And common folk seem children of the sky, And common things seem shaped of the sun. Oh, pitiful! that I who love them, must So soon perceive their shining garments fade! And slowly, slowly, from my eyes of trust Their flaming banner sink into a shade! While this earth's sunshine seems the golden dust Slow settling from that radiant cavalcade.

Rose of the Wind (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1910) is less fresh and fine-flavored. Miss Branch begins to let her thoughtful preoccupations mold her poetry; her work begins to be a bit hard and tasteless. It is not actual dryness that one detects so much as the process of desiccation. Compare "Nimrod" or "The Wedding Feast" with Lascelles Abercrombie's masterful "Emblems of Love." The warmth, the quiet authority in the work of this eloquent Englishman springs from the innate conviction of his characters, not from the author's desire to convince. Glance now at the lengthy mechanism of "The Wedding Feast," with its endless rhymes and involutions, its incredible dialog and such humorously earnest stanzas as:

A soft, a pale, a silent thing, My face did cleave and set it by, And underneath its cloudy wing I heard its separate atoms sing Like the great stars in the sky.

For what is large and what is small

To spiritual eyes?

The great Lord careth not at all

For the dream that men call size.

This reads remarkably like Professor Martin's Primer of Natural Law versified by Samuel T. Coleridge-especially when it continues:

The pebble has a curious will
That in my hand doth lie.
It seems as motionless and still
As the zenith in the sky.

It seems to make not any sound.
It does not hum nor sing.
It keeps a helpless simple round
Yet is a fearful thing.

Its molecules weave in and out,
They leap, they plunge, they dive.—
Up from dark gulfs they whirl about
As if they were alive.

"Nimrod" also suffers because of its frightful demands on the reader's patience. But, in spite of its inordinate length, there is a nobility and not a little verbal grandeur in this eighty-page dissertation. Beneath the rumble there is much to be praised in the beauty of such rhetoric as:

Lizette Reese

. I will lift My fortress straight against God's citadels. And having with my frontage besieged the pale Frontiers of Heavenly air, then will I lift My slow invasion to the immortal plains And there, defying all His hosts, will drive His bright fleeced whirlwinds; hurricanes with eyes; His golden-bellied lightnings; shaggy thunders; His meteors that dart like screaming birds Among tumultuous forests of black night; All strange unhuman monsters that frequent, Angelic, brutish, the jungles of fierce air; His Silences that crouch amid the waste To slav who heareth them beneath the stars Awakened out of sleep; His awful Noise, Whose mane is like a thousand lions' deep. And that with fires doth bristle; His Circumstance, His Peradventure. His Go To-all beasts Furious with dreadful beauty that He keeps To rage with splendor up and down this earth . . .

But it is as a lyric poet that Miss Branch will finally be appraised. As such she will occupy no mean rank in the list of our crusaders of song.

Almost at the opposite intellectual extreme stands Lizette Woodworth Reese. Philosophies, fashions, innovations, movements, concern her not at all; her poetry is bare of social interpretations, problems, intellectuality, almost of ideas. Song, unabashed, undecorated, actually antiquated song is what she delights in. And out of melodies that are as old as music itself, out of tunes with little novelty or *nuance*, she evokes a loveliness that is as fragrant as an old-fashioned flower garden. Miss Reese's realization of this quality finds its fullest expression in the three volumes which she has significantly

entitled A Handful of Lavender, A Branch of May. A Quiet Road. All three, in the beautiful reissues printed by Thomas B. Mosher, show Miss Reese as the forerunner of Sara Teasdale, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Grace Fallow Norton and all those to whom simplicity in song is a prime essential. Miss Reese thrives within her narrow borders; in her very reticence and precision there is a modernity that few of our most advertised "moderns" have surpassed. Without changing the strict contours of her lines she achieves a changeable magic: such poems as "Spicewood," "Spinning Tops," "Bible Stories," "Driving Home the Cows" are vivid without being violent. They are quaint and mysterious, being woven without the shuttle of mystery which too often betrays the pattern. "Tears," possibly her most famous poem, is one of the finest sonnets written by any American. It is so well known that I take for quotation a slighter poem that has escaped our anthologists.

THE ROOM

Towns, lovers, quarrels, bloom—All change from day to day, But not that steadfast room, Far and far away.

The stiff chairs ranged around;
The blue jar flowered wide;
The quick, close racing sound
Of poplar trees outside—

I daresay all are there;
There still two pictures keep—
The girl so tall and fair;
Christ with His foolish sheep.

One of Lizette Reese's most direct descendants is Margaret Widdemer. But to her legacy of music Miss Widdemer adds a definitely social strain. It is a deep and stirring force that compels her. Once in a while it carries her resentments into ranting, but usually it packs into her verse a concentrated vigor (as in "A New Spinning Song"), a sweeping passion (as in the "War March") or a majestic irony (as in the splendid lines of "God and the Strong Ones"). Miss Widdemer does not always maintain this standard of excellence. She is a most uneven craftsman; she is too hasty and uncritical a worker; frequently she falls into mere glibness and poeticizing. She has written many examples of a kind of verse that is empty of everything but its form; easy-selling trade goods that owe their origin to nothing stronger than a desire to fill a space in some magazine. In the reissue of her volume Factories (Henry Holt and Co., 1917) Miss Widdemer has improved her collection not only by what she has added but by what she has left out. The omission of many of the merely loquacious lyrics and the blue-penciling of several verses that belong to the juvenile Pierrot school of poetry have given the book a unity that the first edition barely promised. Such keenly conceived things as "The Housekeeper," "An Old Wife's Song," the sharp and sympathetic portrait of the woman of the older day who "was not wise nor public-spirited," who "could bear heroes, never understand them "-these poems suggest a greater depth and dignity in their more carefully arranged surroundings.

But Miss Widdemer sings not only of bread but of roses—and nightingales. She knows how to pluck the sensitive lyre without trying to snap the strings. Fragile

but not necessarily frail, an insistent music arises from "Siege," "Not unto the Forest" and "A Cyprian Woman," with its concluding resignation:

Jewel-laden are my hands,
Tall my stone above;
Do not weep that I sleep
Who was wise in love.

Where I walk a shadow gray Through gray asphodel, I am glad, who have had All that Life could tell.

Another lyricist who is often betrayed by her facility is Amelia Josephine Burr. Her technical ease is such that it allures her into writing that is clever rather than creative, dextrous instead of deep. Her lyrics seldom seem to be wrung from her, seldom driven by anything stronger than a talent for dramatic verse and a dependable technique. Although her gift has broadened since the publication of The Roadside Fire (George H. Doran, 1013), she still leans too much on the quickly summoned phrase, the handy word, the well-built structure already erected and so often used. But she does not always mistake the poetic pattern for the poem. In In Deep Places (George H. Doran, 1915) she strikes out for the heights and, what is more, she sometimes reaches The first seven poems, for instance, are a revealing and dramatic group. But they are something more. Miss Burr's efforts to re-create or rather re-value the dramatis personae of William Shakespeare and William Morris show, under her feminine psychology, a personality of their own. One cannot doubt the laughing truth in "Petruchio's Wife." And Cleopatra, or at lease a vital part of her, lives again in "At Dendera," just as the spirit of an empire lives in what is this poet's finest achievement, "In the Roman Forum." There is no tinsel or trickery here. There is, instead, the contemplation of nobility that is as imperishable as the awe of beauty.

This awe sits lighter upon Eunice Tietjens. Equipped with a strong, satiric sense, she, like Oppenheim and Frost, finds nothing so romantic as what is hard, workaday, close at hand. The subjects scorned by most of her lyric compatriots, she seizes upon with avidity. Witness her illuminating portrayal of "The Drug Clerk" and "The Steam Shovel," which lives in such characteristic details as

The iron head
Set on a monstrous, jointed neck,
Glides here and there, lifts, settles on the red
Moist floor, with nose dropped in the dirt, at beck
Of some incredible control.
He snorts and pauses couchant for a space,
Then slowly lifts, and tears the gaping hole
Yet deeper in earth's flank. A sudden race
Of loosened earth and pebbles trickles there
Like blood-drops in a wound.
But he, the monster swings his load around—
Weightless it seems as air.
His mammoth jaw
Drops widely open with a rasping sound,
And all the red earth vomits from his maw.

and this sudden, fanciful leap:

O thwarted monster, born at man's decree, A lap-dog dragon, eating from his hand

And doomed to fetch and carry at command. Have you no longing ever to be free? In warm, electric days to run a-muck, Ranging like some mad dinosaur, Your fiery heart at war With this strange world, the city's restless ruck. Where all drab things that toil, save you alone, Have life: And you the semblance only, and the strife? Do you not yearn to rip the roots of stone Of these great piles men build, And hurl them down with shriek of shattered steel, Scorning your own sure doom, so you may feel. You too, the lust with which your fathers killed? Or is your soul in very deed so tame, The blood of Grendel watered to a gruel, That you are well content With heart of flame Thus placidly to chew your cud of fuel And toil in peace for man's aggrandizement?

Observe also "The Bacchante to Her Babe" (which, with "The Steam Shovel," can be found in Harriet Monroe's excellent if overbalanced anthology *The New Poetry*). Here is an instance of how our younger poets are charging old myths with fresh values and new life. Instead of a ponderous and chilly classicism, here is lightness and warmth; the background, free of references to "Parnassian slopes," "Cytherea's doves" and "the blue Aegean," is as fresh as the words that evoke it. The setting is ancient, the spirit modern. The babe is any "merry little roll of fat"; the Bacchante, any young mother.

In her volume *Profiles from China* (Ralph Fletcher Seymour, 1917) Miss Tietjens stops being a lyric poet long enough to draw a series of sketches in free verse

of people and things seen in the interior. These flashes of dirt and beauty, of luxury and disease, of a gaunt and alien industrialism struggling in the midst of an inherited torpor, are vivid and emotional. "The Hand," which serves as a proem, is a powerful and sinister portrait; beneath its suave outlines we get a glimpse of the cool and cruel depths of the Orient. "A Scholar" and "In the Mixed Court: Shanghai" are sharpened by an indirect irony; "Cormorants" has an unusually fierce undercurrent. These delineations are only surpassed by the restrained passion of "The Chair Ride" and the splendid silhouette "New China: The Iron Works" which begins:

The furnaces, the great steel furnaces, tremble and glow; gigantic machinery clanks, and in living iridescent streams the white-hot slag pours out.

This is tomorrow set in yesterday, the west imbedded in the east; a graft but not a growth.

Something of this toughness and tenderness is in the work of Harriet Monroe, who was a poet long before she became an editor and anthologist. Her best and most recent volume, You and I (The Macmillan Co., 1914), contains better things than many of the selections which, as editor and enthusiast, she has printed with such misdirected gusto. "The Hotel," for example, is one of the few poems written in the Whitman idiom (including even the Whitman catalog) that does not degenerate into imitative verbosity, that is authentic and first-hand, and that reaches a conclusion of its own. But she too is chiefly a lyric poet; she makes songs even though she makes them seemingly against her will. Yet there is little trace of resistance or hesitancy in the songs themselves. Observe "A Farewell." which is melodious

and simple without being mawkish; "Pain," where sentiment neatly avoids sentimentality; "Love Song," where Miss Monroe takes a leaf from Sara Teasdale's book. Or, for a more liberal infusion of that modernism which the editor has sponsored, note how dextrously the poet has woven it in so human a lyric as

ON THE PORCH

As I lie roofed in, screened in, From the pattering rain,
The summer rain—
As I lie
Snug and dry,
And hear the birds complain:

Oh, billow on billow,
Oh, roar on roar,
Over me wash
The seas of war.
Over me—down—down—
Lunges and plunges
The huge gun with its one blind eye,
The armored train;
And swooping out of the sky,
The aeroplane.

Down—down—
The army proudly swinging
Under gay flags,
The glorious dead heaped up like rags,
A church with bronze bells ringing,
A city all towers,
Gardens of lovers and flowers,
The round world swinging
In the light of the sun:
All broken, undone,
And down—under
Black surges of thunder.

The Lyricists

Oh, billow on billow
Oh, roar on roar;
Over me wash
The seas of war. . . .

As I lie roofed in, screened in, From the pattering rain, The summer rain—As I lie Snug and dry, And hear the birds complain.

I wish I had space for the detailed description of the various other lyrical volumes that prove how sonant America has grown. But I have not even room for a bare list. Such a tabulation would run higher than even the most chauvinistic members of our Poetry Societies would believe. Yet, unable as I am to turn this chapter into an index, I must at least mention Edith Wyatt's The Wind in the Corn (D. Appleton and Co., 1917), an ambitious but never pompous attempt to translate into song the America of lakes and plateaus, the democracy of labor and the surge of the city; Fannie Stearns Davis's Crack o' Dawn (The Macmillan Co., 1915), a book of reticent but revealing meditations; Louise Driscoll's uncollected poems—particularly her dramatic pieces, "The Metal Checks" and "The Child of God"; Sara N. Cleghorn's Portraits and Protests (Henry Holt and Co., 1917), in which a love of quaintness is mixed with a hatred of social injustice; Alice Brown's new collection of old and recent poems in The Road to Castaly (The Macmillan Co., 1917), a volume of luminous and subtle verse that takes on fresh vitality in its new edition; Jessie B. Rittenhouse's The Door of Dreams (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918), brief lyrics which, ignoring the stress

of these times, turn to the oldest of themes and reanimate them with a personal vibrancy; Florence Kiper Frank's forceful *The Jew to Jesus and Other Poems* (Mitchell Kennerley, 1915); Grace Hazard Conkling's delicate and whimsical *Afternoons of April* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915); Olive Tilford Dargan's quaint *Path Flower* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914); Grace Fallow Norton's poignant *Little Gray Songs from St. Joseph's* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913).

These are but a mention of the worthiest. And these, as well as the books referred to in the preceding paragraphs, were all published within the last five years. And all of them were written by women. Surely here is a conclusive if not an inclusive answer to those who complain that our poets have lost the power, if they ever possessed it, to sing.

"H. D." AND THE IMAGISTS

BEFORE considering the Imagists as a group, as a tendency or as individuals, it will be best to examine the thing around which most of the agitation has raged:—their program. And the simplest and most authentic version of their various pronunciamentos can be found in the first anthology of Some Imagist Poets (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915). This, verbatim, is their credo:

- I. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the *exact* word, not the nearly exact, nor the merely decorative word.
- 2. To create new rhythms—as the expressions of new moods—and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon "free verse" as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of the poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional forms. In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea.
- 3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. It is not good art to write badly about aeroplanes and automobiles; nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic values of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring nor so old-fashioned as an aeroplane of the year 1911.
- 4. To present an image (hence the name: "Imagist"). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.

- 5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.
- 6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is the very essence of poetry.

It does not seem possible that this set of honest and almost platitudinous principles could have evoked the storm of argument, fury and downright vilification that broke after the indomitable Miss Lowell began to champion them. It must be that her pugnacity evoked a hidden belligerence in the hitherto mild professorial bosoms, for it is difficult to see what there is in these tenets to cause the unprecedented excitement that swept the literary centers where the war was still remote. Far from being revolutionary, these principles were not new; they were not even thought so by their sponsors. The Imagists themselves declared they were "the essentials of all great poetry, indeed of all great literature"; they merely thought these principles had fallen into desuetude and so they restated them. When the Imagists failed it was not because they held to their articles of faith, but because they could not live up to them. Their standards were far higher than the average of their work. Actually they suffered from two things: too much advertising and the larger group's hatred of the smaller one. Yet the infuriated critics of Imagism suffered still more. was with a morning-after feeling that most of them realized that, in trying to protect the sacred future from such horrors as "using the exact word," from allowing "freedom in the choice of subject," from a poetry that was "hard and clear" and from the importance of concentration, they were actually attacking the best traditions of their beloved past. The Imagists, in repeating somewhat self-consciously what a generation of poets had practised unconsciously, were, even in their over-emphasis, helping the tide of realistic and romantic naturalism—a tide of which they were merely one of the waves.

The chief trouble with the Imagists was not their attitude toward literature but toward life. In the main their work concerned itself little with "the language of common speech," they produced a plethora of poetry that was anything but "hard and clear," their belief that "concentration is the very essence of poetry "did not prevent them from being false to their faith. But they displayed a consistent fidelity to at least one clause, and that was their determination "to allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject." This demand for a free and full expression caused much hurling of such epithets as "atheists," "anarchists," etc., by those placid conservatives who felt that poetry should deal only with what could be made precise and pretty; it enraged those to whom liberty in any form is repugnant. True, it was often free of everything from rules to reticence, it was in fact widely varietistic. So much so, that its disciples were in a moment of recklessness referred to as vers libertins. They assumed as an essential the questionable desirability of cosmopolitanism in art; they were continually falling in love with a new "influence." One heard, beneath the slogans of independence and their opposition to contemporary rules, a strange jargon of foreign cultures, a dependence on French or Japanese standards and a manifest allegiance to other rules.

"We are not a school of painters," the Imagists declared; and in this very self-conscious denial they drew attention to their primary weakness, for much of their work was definitely derived not merely from painting but from the technique of painting. They were too often

completely satisfied to make one isolated image serve as a work in its entirety; they spent all their energies polishing one detail of composition which a more robust creator would have thrown off as an illuminating bit to be fused with something warmer and larger. In their striving to produce an atmospheric effect, a single line of movement, a mere flash of color, and considering such productions the Ding an sich, an end in itself, they showed their very preoccupation with painting and music, and with the most tenuous aspects of these. Their uncoördinated striving to reproduce such effects revealed an art less concerned with its own power than with ideas taken from other arts and it disclosed, as The New Republic pointed out, "a certain poverty of poetic feeling . . . a certain slenderness and intellectuality of inspiration not compatible with the making of vital poetry."

This mistaken insistence on the aesthetic functions of art, on the pleasure derived from feats of skill and the exercise of technical adroitness was as often harmful to the Imagists as it was confusing to their audiences. It stripped their lines of physical feeling all too frequently; it substituted for the conflict of ordinary emotions a purely intellectual thrill. In spite of many instances to the contrary, their work is the product of a hot-house culture, removed from the strengthening coarseness of earth; withdrawn, sensitive and, of its kind, exquisite.

There is an air of curious sexlessness to this poetry that hides a taint of uncertain effeminacy. There is, moreover, one rather well-defined if not exactly sharp technical line of cleavage between two sections of the new poets. One set, represented by Frost, Robinson, Lindsay, Wheelock, and most of the Englishmen (Masefield, Gibson, Sassoon, Abercrombie, Brooke and others),

make meter the unitary principle of their verse. The other faction, which includes Carl Sandburg, the greater portion of Masters' and Amy Lowell's work, Kreymborg and the frank insurgents in "Others," make cadence the basis of their form. The Imagists are almost entirely to be found in the second group. Their choice in the matter of music is consistent with their intellectual preference. And it is typical of them that, in their efforts to extend rhythmic borders, they surpass their associates usually by making their cadences far more rigid and less musical. They are what might be called eye-poets as distinguished from their rivals, the ear-poets. It seems safe to say that the bulk of Imagism and, for that matter vers libre, is an overflow from the plastic and graphic arts. Certain visual effects are thus remarkably achieved; abrupt flashes of color, bursts of speed, interjections of names, streets, and the spectacle of emotion are dramatically summoned. But even with an excess of changing rhythms and an increased tempo, the ear is assaulted far less than the eye. The appeal is chiefly an ocular one; and in its overinsistence on what should be seen and not heard, in its too-acrobatic leaping from object to object, it ends by distressing and irritating the optic nerve. One feels that their poetry suffers from nothing so much as an effort to rivet the attention on everything at once: a weakness that might be diagnosed as eye-strain. Their credo seems to discount and decry the possibilities of normal vision.

Let us now forget the program of the Imagists, which has often so little to do with their poetry, and turn to the accomplishment. At the outset one is struck by the indefinite borders of the school. In the first of the collections, *Des Imagistes* (published in America in 1914 by Alfred and Charles Boni), we find the names of Richard

Aldington, "H. D.," F. S. Flint, Skipwith Cannell, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Ford Maddox Hueffer, Allen Upward, John Cournos—a strangely assembled congregation. It would be difficult to ascertain just what there was in common between Upward's competent prose adaptations ("Scented Leaves from a Chinese Jar"), Cournos' inoffensive rendering of K. Tetmaier's none too original fantasy, James Joyce's excellent but reminiscent rhymes and Skipwith Cannell's dull Nocturnes. It could not have been the six quoted tenets, for, even had these been formulated, they would have been irreparably violated by such incongruous examples, by poetry that may have been "hard" but was seldom "clear," by images as continuously borrowed and banal as:

Thy feet,
That are like little, silver birds,
Thou hast set upon pleasant ways;
Therefore I will follow thee,
Thou Dove of the Golden Eyes,
Upon any path I will follow thee,
For the light of thy beauty
Shines before me like a torch.

("Nocturne." Skipwith Cannell.)

Nor could the theory have been sustained by rhetoric as cloudy as this (from Williams' "Postlude"):

Now that I have cooled to you
Let there be gold of tarnished masonry,
Temples soothed by the sun to ruin
That sleeps utterly.
Give me hand for the dances,
Ripples at Philæ in and out,
And lips, my Lesbian,
Wall flowers that once were flame.

Your hair is my Carthage And my arms the bow And our words arrows To shoot the stars, Who from that misty sea Swarm to destroy us.

Whatever the bond was, it was not strong enough to preserve this peculiar union. A little later Pound went over to the Vorticists, Hueffer went back to his prose, Cournos to his art criticism, Joyce to his novels, Williams and Cannell joined the more insurgent insurgents in This left Richard Aldington, "H. D.," " Others." F. S. Flint and Amy Lowell. Miss Lowell, feeling that what was left of the group should be kept intact, became their leader, arranged for the publication of three annual anthologies and secured the addition of two other poets, D. H. Lawrence and John Gould Fletcher. It is with these anthologies that the rest of this chapter concerns itself, and with two of the contributors in particular. eliminate Lawrence (who is actually no more an Imagist than a militarist); Aldington and Flint are Englishmen and therefore not in the range of the present work; Amy Lowell, an Imagist only on occasion and then experimentally, has been considered in the chapter devoted to her. This leaves "H. D." (née Hilda Doolittle, an ex-Philadelphian, now the wife of Richard Aldington) and John Gould Fletcher, originally of Little Rock, Arkansas.

"H. D." is by all odds the most important of the group. She is the most nearly perfect of the Imagists; she is, in fact, the only true Imagist. Whatever her work lacks of vigor or warmth, it lacks because of a predetermined attitude which she never changes. This consis-

tency results in work that is often stiff and sterile, often overweighted with classic literature, but fully as often in poetry that is delicate, fine-spun and exquisitely polished. In the narrow borders of her style she has achieved a concentration so great that it has an intensity of its own. Witness this from Some Imagist Poets—1915 (Houghton Mifflin Co.):

OREAD

Whirl up, sea—
Whirl your pointed pines,
Splash your great pines
On our rocks,
Hurl your green over us,
Cover us with your pools of fir.

With all their quiet power and accurate representation of a tossed sea, these lines reveal "H. D."'s limitation. And that limitation is the very thing that the Imagists disclaimed; the poem is much more related to painting than it is to poetry; it is static, hard, fixed. The "pointed pines" gives us the picture of waves on a canvas rather than the movement which poetry, with its fluid line, can suggest. A dozen such instances may be found in her contributions to the three anthologies, but it is in her own volume that they can be studied in what, in spite of the smallness of her range, is a remarkable variety.

In Sea Garden (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916) one notices at once how many and sensitive are "H. D."'s perceptions of nature and how diverse are the rhythms she uses to express this keenness. Often her love for the beauty of an orchard, a pear-tree, a sea-rose is so great that it hurts her, and yet, with the artist's self-inflicted blows that wring ecstasy out of torture, she opens and

reopens her wounds. Witness her "Orchard" or her "Sheltered Garden" that ends:

For this beauty, beauty without strength, chokes out life. I want wind to break, scatter these pink-stalks, snap off their spiced heads, fling them about with dead leaves—spread the path with twigs, limbs broken off, trail great pine branches, hurled from some far wood right across the melon-patch, break pear and quince—leave half-trees, torn, twisted but showing the fight was valiant.

O to blot out this garden to forget, to find a new beauty in some terrible wind-tortured place.

This, of course, may be what "H. D." longs for, but it is the last thing that she suggests. It is not "a new beauty in some terrible, wind-tortured place" that her art evokes; it is a desire for a calm and secure loveliness in an artistically pagan and preferably Greek world. Her Hellenic attitude is not assumed as it is with some of her less sincere colleagues; it seems an inherent part of her spiritual contemplation of beauty. Thus when she attempts to react to the brutal modern world, to sound a "new beauty in some terrible place" as in "Cities," she is utterly confused and thrown back upon herself. Routed by a modernity which does not express her and which she cannot express, she makes the thinnest possible

pretense of believing in its beauty. "Strange paradox!" writes Miss Lowell in the highly appreciative concluding chapter of her *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*, "To be the prophet of a renewing art, and to spend one's life longing for a vanished loveliness." It is in the blend of an idyllic and realistic paganism that she is truly herself. Observe the second of the two poems entitled "Garden":

O wind, rend open the heat, cut apart the heat, rend it to tatters.

Fruit cannot drop through this thick air fruit cannot fall into the heat that presses up and blunts the points of pears and rounds the grapes.

Cut the heat—plough through it, turning it on either side of your path.

Here, in the fewest possible words, is something beyond the description of heat; here is the effect of it. And with what swift strokes the picture is drawn. In those four lines with their imaginative evocation of

> heat that presses up and blunts the points of pears and rounds of grapes.

one feels the very weight and thick solidity of a July afternoon.

Less potent but no less penetrating are "Mid-day," "Evening," "Sea Violet," "Storm" and this frail mirror of loveliness:

PEAR TREE

Silver dust lifted from the earth, higher than my arms reach, you have mounted. O silver, higher than my arms reach you front us with great mass;

no flower ever opened so staunch a white leaf, no flower ever parted silver from such rare silver;

O white pear, your flower-tufts thick on the branch bring summer and ripe fruits in their purple hearts.

In all of these poems one receives the impression of something thin and fine struggling out of a narrow, compressed mold, of a gift used with a knowledge of its limitations, with almost too sharp a precision and always with a quiet distinction of utterance.

This can hardly be said for John Gould Fletcher. At first glance, he appears to be a much more versatile artist than "H. D.," and a far more imaginative one. But his versatility usually seems the result of a dissatisfied experimentation rather than vigor, and his imagination an overworked, dehumanized and almost devitalized one.

Rarely are his images spontaneous; they unfold like the product of a reckoning rather than a reckless or playful mind. The chief effect of Fletcher's earlier variegated volumes is that of cold whimsicality, of a wearisome kaleidoscope of colors, of a magic-lantern show instead of magic. In one part of his "London Excursion" we have such glib profundities as:

An arch under which we slide Divides our life for us: After we have passed it. We know we have left something behind We shall not see again.

Passivity,
Gravity,
Are changed into hesitating, clanking pistons and wheels.
The trams come whooping up one by one,
Yellow pulse-beats spreading through the darkness.

Music-hall posters squall out:
The passengers shrink together,
I enter indelicately into all their souls.

It is a glossy skating rink, On which winged spirals clasp and bend each other: And suddenly slide backwards towards the centre, After a too-brief release.

A second arch is a wall
To separate our souls from rotted cables
Of stale greenness.
A shadow cutting off the country from us,
Out of it rise red walls.

Yet I revolt: I bend, I twist myself, I curl into a million convolutions: Pink shapes without angle, Anything to be soft and woolly, Anything to escape.

In the volume Irradiations—Sand and Spray (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915) Fletcher is at his best. Skipping rapidly over the rather pompous preface (and it is interesting to note how all the Imagists, with the exception of "H. D.," like to spread themselves over pages of accepted truisms and contradictions in windy preambles) there are many instances of a fertile if not a coördinated fancy. Fletcher believes in the "unrelated" method; and so what to others might seem a primary weakness of structure and design is to him a cardinal virtue. Still, for purely suggestive images, nothing could be more pictorially fanciful than:

The trees, like great jade elephants, Chained, stamp and shake 'neath the gadflies of the breeze; The trees lunge and plunge, unruly elephants: The clouds are their crimson howdah-canopies, The sunlight glints like the golden robe of a Shah. Would I were tossed on the wrinkled backs of those trees.

And here is an instance of how Fletcher can, by the use of a sudden figure, turn a statement of fact into an illuminating fantasy:

Flickering of incessant rain
On flashing pavements:
Sudden scurry of umbrellas:
Bending, recurved blossoms of the storm.

The last line transforms all that has gone before, with its sharp imaginative twist. And, though in a quieter and less exuberant vein, there is a more individual note in the fancy of this section:

O, seeded grass, you army of little men
Crawling up the long slope with quivering, quick blades of
steel:

You who storm millions of graves, tiny green tentacles of Earth.

Interlace yourself tightly over my heart,

And do not let me go:

For I would lie here forever and watch with one eye
The pilgrimaging ants in your dull, savage jungles,
The while with the other I see the stiff lines of the slope
Break in mid-air, a wave surprisingly arrested;

And above them, wavering, dancing, bodiless, colourless, unreal.

The long thin lazy fingers of the heat.

These are all unusually successful in execution and effect. The volume is more nearly a unit than anything Fletcher has done. But even here there are hints of his growing wordiness, of a jumble of facts and figures carrying the unrelated method to a point where it loses itself in incoherence. Witness this passage:

Over the roof-tops race the shadows of clouds; Like horses the shadows of clouds charge down the street.

Whirlpools of purple and gold, Winds from the mountains of cinnebar,

Lacquered mandarin moments, palanquins swaying and balancing

Amid the vermilion pavilions, against the jade balustrades. Glint of the glittering wings of dragon-flies in the light: Silver filaments, golden flakes settling downwards, Rippling, quivering flutters, repulse and surrender, The sun broidered upon the rain, The rain rustling with the sun.

Disorganization cannot go much further than this.

In the following volume, Goblins and Pagodas (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916), we find the fault intensified. After a longer, more blatant preface and a graphic, reminiscent section ("The Ghosts of an Old House"), there are

eleven "color symphonies" written around a vague program and a vaguer theory. Just as Swinburne, with all his mastery of verbal melody, proved that poetry inevitably fails when existing principally on sound, so Fletcher, obsessed with his pigments, proves that it cannot live when it places its dependence on color. Here is a passage from the "Red Symphony":

Like a crimson lake
The light overflows and touches the bulging surfaces
With carmine, with scarlet,
With orange, with vermilion,
With brick red, with bluish purple,
With maroon, with rose, with russet,
With savage green, with snowy blue,
With grey, with ebony, with gold.

This seems far less like a fragment of poetry than a part of Winsor and Newton's color chart. Such tabulating leaves one as unmoved as Fletcher's reiterated platitudes about "the aesthetic form-basis of poetry," the "relations that exist between color and sound," and a stale exposition of the post-impressionist method. His attempts to explain these are lugubrious; his efforts to illustrate them disastrous. The result of a theory, of convictions that have been thought out first and felt afterwards, these symphonies are (with the exception of the "Green Symphony") as arbitrary and wearisome as Scriabin's exaggerated "Prometheus," a tone-poem which attempted to make colored lights reinforce a muddy orchestration. This method Fletcher emulates. Color is indubitably here; but the rout of brilliance is so disorganized and dazzling that the eye, sick of brightness, sees only a blur of gray. The conservative Walter de la

Mare in a picturesque little poem entitled "Silver" accomplishes an effect of color that Fletcher in his whole volume scarcely approximates. One has the impression of tints, dyes, brilliant cones and cubes hissing and splitting into new shades; a crashing and crumbling of moods and images. Here and there the lines descend, with uncertain footsteps, into a fumbling tentative sort of rhyme. Here and there one can, in spite of frantic twists, follow the bright convolutions of these lines—but only here and there.

One poem of Fletcher's, a piece of rich polyphonic prose, has not appeared in either of his books or the various Imagist anthologies. And this is strange, since it is the best thing he has ever written. I refer to "Clipper Ships," a picturesque and exceedingly skilful evocation of an era that has passed. His "Lincoln" (in Some Imagist Poets—1917) is, in spite of its borrowings from Whitman, similarly notable and reflects a poise and dignity that hitherto have been strangers to Fletcher's work. These are genuinely American lines; by turns rugged and suave, leashed and leaping; they are worthy of the themes they express. "Clipper Ships" has this free beginning, which is extended and enlarged as the poem proceeds:

Beautiful as a tiered cloud, skysails set and shrouds twanging, she emerges from the surges that keep running away before day on the low Pacific shore. With the roar of the wind blowing half a gale after, she heels and lunges, and buries her bows in the smother, lifting them swiftly and scattering the glistening spray-drops from her jibsails with laughter. Her spars are cracking, her royals are half splitting, her lower stunsail booms are bent aside, like bowstrings ready to loose, and the water is roaring into her scuppers, but she still staggers out under a full press of

sail, her upper trucks enkindled by the sun into shafts of rosy flame.

Oh, the anchor is up and the sails, they are set, and it's 'way Rio; round Cape Stiff and up to Boston, ninety days hauling at the ropes: the decks slope and the stays creak as she lurches into it, sending her jib awash at every thrust, and a handful of dust and a thirst to make you weep are all we get for being two years away to sea.

In his Arizona poems we have, in spite of periods of vagueness and mere gesticulation, an equally interesting utterance. His treatment of an old civilization in conflict with the new is suggestive and often succinct. His latest volume, Japanese Prints (The Four Seas Co., 1918), shows a further advance in his experiments in concision; by adapting the hokku to his purpose, he has not only learned to control an unselective rush of words, he is teaching himself the Imagist tenets concerning condensation and concentration, he is learning his own credo which he has consistently violated. Out of a tangle of theories a personality begins to be heard.

And so, without questioning too closely the definitions of Imagism (which, as Francis Hackett slyly remarks, "are merely an attempt to do to poetry what the label 'Rubberset' is supposed to do to shaving brushes—establish a trade-name and the prestige that goes with it"), discounting an inverted classicism that attaches itself to certain members of the group, in spite of the frantic convulsions of its more spectacular adherents and recent self-elected exponents, Imagism is a strong and healthy influence. It may not have a great flowering of its own but it will assist others to grow. It is excellent fertilizer in the fields of poetry; it will help nurture a new and more vigorous crop. It will do this since its very hardness, its sharp edges and sharper images, its

constant insistence on packing and cutting down, are vitalizing reactions from the verbose, the carelessly facile and the pretty reiteration of copy-book maxims. In the protest and occasionally in the poetry of the Imagists, America expresses a part of her healthy and creative dissatisfaction.

"OTHERS"

ONE of the most outstanding features in the work of several of our younger poets is a consistent distortion not only of past standards but of present values. distortion is the natural consequence of an unnatural fear of formulas, both of phrase and idea; an exaggerated horror of the accepted pattern in any of its forms. As an expression of insurrectionary youth, as a scornful contempt hurled at a literary philistinism or the capitalist system or middle-class prejudices, this revolt is the sign of a healthy and creative discontent. But when, in an effort to avoid the cliché at any cost, it becomes incoherent in metaphors that are more delirious than daring, when it pulls any casual image to pieces or turns a vagrant and merely bright emotion into a dark study, it is likely to be a confession of its own creative failure—an admission of an inability to work and play with the material of life. One does not have the right to demand continuous high spirits from the poetically young; one does hope, however, to be saved from the blasé retrospection and weary vision of crabbéd youth.

Let me particularize. I turn to a long introspective poem in which a young man, afflicted with a subtle neurosis, is obsessed by the dark thought not of death, as has been the habit of poetic young men, but of the dissolution of middle age and the tragedy of thinning hair. The poem begins casually enough:

Let us go then, you and I, When the evening is spread out against the sky . . .

And then the poet stopped. "You and I"... "evening"... "sky"... It had a familiar and hence abhorred sound. This was obviously a bad start. Even at its birth, the poem was in danger of dying of premature senility. A hasty subcutaneous injection of some startling simile might save it. Therefore:

. . . evening is spread out against the sky—Like a patient etherized upon the table.

Thus the opening of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot, one of the ablest of the insurgents.

Another triumph of the bizarre over the obvious occurs in F. S. Flint's "Eau Forte," the first two lines of which are:

On black, bare trees a stale-cream moon Hangs dead, and sours the unborn buds.

In both these examples, fished up at random from an overflow of poetry magazines, one sees, in two genuinely gifted authors of almost opposed temperament, a common weakness: a desire to respond to a theory. Though the program is only half-conscious, the result is the same:—poetry by intention rather than by intuition. Theirs is not so much an art as an attitude toward it.

So with "Others," a loosely joined group comprising the left wing, the literary extremists. The greater part of their labor is not so much an expression of delight in their work as an expression of displeasure in the work of others. Their resentment of the academics is so keen that it cripples them and prevents the free expression of which they boast. They are chained to their impulse to react and startle; slaves of fashion which, whether in dress or poetry, is the most transitory of things.

These strictures are uttered in a rather general indictment. Exceptions must be made at the very drawing-up of the charge. For the group is so strangely assorted that what particular verdict might be sustained against one of the offenders would be set aside as a gross miscarriage of justice in the case of his alleged fellow-conspirator. It is necessary, therefore, to examine in more detail the two volumes made up from the various issues of their sudden and spasmodic magazine.

The first thing that strikes one in Others—1916 (Alfred A. Knopf) is its deliberate eccentricity; the second feature is its unconscious incongruity. We have on one page the delicate and finely molded lines of Adelaide Crapsey and on another the blatant absurdities of Skipwith Cannell; Mary Carolyn Davies' simple and unpretentious "Songs of a Girl" are separated by only a few sheets from Mina Loy's nephritic "Love Songs." I quote, as Exhibit A, the first of Miss Loy's chansons d'amour:

Spawn of fantasies
Sitting the appraisable
Pig Cupid his rosy snout
Rooting erotic garbage
"Once upon a time"
Pulls a weed white star-topped
Among wild oats sown in mucous membrane
I would an eye in a Bengal light
Eternity in a sky-rocket
Constellations in an ocean
Whose rivers run no fresher
Than a trickle of saliva

There are suspect places.

I must live in my lantern Trimming subliminal flicker Virginal to the bellows Of experience

Colored glass.

And, as a further exhibit, which I mark for identification, I offer Marianne Moore's "To Statecraft Embalmed," in its lucid entirety:

TO STATECRAFT EMBALMED

There is nothing to be said for you. Guard Your secret. Conceal it under your "hard Plumage," necromancer.

 \mathbf{c}

Bird, whose "tents" were "awnings of Egyptian Yarn," shall Justice' faint, zigzag inscription—
Leaning like a dancer—
Show

The pulse of its once vivid sovereignty?
You say not, and transmigrating from the
Sarcophagus, you wind
Snow

Silence round us and with moribund talk, Half limping and half ladified, you stalk About. Ibis, we find No

Virtue in you—alive and yet so dumb. Discreet behavior is not now the sum Of statesmanlike good sense.

Though

It were the incarnation of dead grace? As if a death mask ever could replace Life's faulty excellence!

Slow

To remark the steep, too strict proportion
Of your throne, you'll see the wrenched distortion
Of suicidal dreams.

Go
Staggering toward itself and with its bill,
Attack its own identity, until
Foe seems friend and friend seems
Foe.

These, and other strained vociferations, seem doubly impoverished beside the penetrating and almost forgotten free verse departures of Stephen Crane, whose *The Black Riders* was published a quarter of a century ago.

The work of Alfred Kreymborg, editor and leader of the group, is much less perverse and far more puzzling. He alternates between a sincere desire to please himself and the mere impulse to surprise others. More than the Imagists, he cuts down his poems to the fewest possible words, but, unlike them, he sacrifices the clarity of thought to a strained simplicity of speech. In such things as "Variations" he attains an ostentation of simplicity, an ingenuousness that is both suspicious and affected. But he is often genuinely unassuming and earnest. And at such times his poetry is provocative in the best sense. A more complete appraisal of Kreymborg may be reached by an examination of his Mushrooms (John Marshall Co., Ltd., 1016). Here his delicate etchings and concise ironies are seen with few detractions; there is a neat disposal if not a solution of intricacies. Observe the freshness of "Parasite"; the dexterity of "Cortège" and "To Circe"; the whimiscal grace of "Theology" and "In a Dream." Frequently his imagination overleaps itself and lands him in dullness; the fooling that should have been light is laborious, the whimsy grows heavy-footed, elephantastic. But he is little short of exquisite in certain periods of restrained fancy, in the combination of frankness and fragility in such a rondo as

OLD MANUSCRIPT

The sky is that beautiful old parchment in which the sun and the moon keep their diary. To read it all. one must be a linguist more learned than Father Wisdom; and a visionary more clairvoyant than Mother Dream. But to feel it. one must be an apostle: one who is more than intimate in having been, always, the only confidantlike the earth or the sea.

There is lustiness in Kreymborg too. He can be downright brutal without losing himself in brutality. And in "Etching" and "America" his sense of brusqueness intensifies ideas that are far from unusual. It is, in fact, from an intellectual standpoint that this group is weakest. Their revolt is so specious, their dissatisfaction so superficial. The chief defect of much of this poetry is not that it questions, but that it accepts evasive, half-formulated or factitious answers. Frequently its very questioning is a sham, being little more than a quibble about the externals of form. It often deceives itself by the mere technical twisting of a platitude; the breaking-up of a hackneyed thought into spasmodic lines; by a few erratic capitals and an inverted image. This impulse is dying rapidly; the war, with its tremendous responsibilities, its devastating vitality, has made these thin emotional substitutes seem doubly artificial. It is becoming increasingly difficult to shock one's readers with an intellectual concept that was stale in 1885, even though one dislocates prosody and punctuation in the attempt.

But to return to Kreymborg. He sinks to the low level of the group less often than one would judge from such poor contributions to the anthology as "The Whip of the Unborn" and "Overheard in an Asylum." Let none accuse him of a continuance of such caperings before he has gone over Kreymborg's volume from which, by way of coda, I take this picture

CEZANNE

Our door was shut to the noon-day heat. We could not see him.

We might not have heard him either—resting, dozing, dreaming pleasantly.

But his step was tremendous—are mountains on the march?

He was no man who passed. But a great faithful horse dragging a load up the hill.

Another who appears to disadvantage in the group is Orrick Johns. From a mixed assortment of his "Olives" (in the *Others* anthology) I pick the following more or less ripe specimens:

SHOE-STRING

Little old shoe, You need a shoe-string; I shall find one for you, For without it you are helpless As a man who studies regulations; But with a yellow one Like a woman who is bald.

BEAUTIFUL MIND

Oh, beautiful mind,
I lost it
In a lot of frying pans
And calendars and carpets
And beer bottles. . . .
Oh, my beautiful mind!

BLUE UNDERSHIRTS

Blue undershirts,
Upon a line,
It is not necessary to say to you.
Anything about it—
What they do,
What they might do . . . blue undershirts.

SOMEWHERE

Now I know
I have been eating apple-pie for breakfast
In the New England
Of your sexuality.

These maladroit exercises in cleverness betray nothing so much as a mind that is not naturally acrobatic. It is the same failing that exhibits itself so pitifully in the poor dialect verse that comprises the first division of his volume, Asphalt and Other Poems (Alfred A. Knopf, 1917). But it is a far different poet that emerges from the rest of the book, particularly in the section "Country Rhymes." Here the airs and affectations are forgotten; the self-conscious strain goes into songs that are anything but cerebral. For the few that are reminiscent, there are several poems here that carry strangeness beneath their sometimes familiar music. "Little Things" has a dignity and loveliness of its own: "Mysteries" is as fresh as it

is unaffected; "Dilemma," "The Horns of Peace" and "The Mad Woman" are more lyrical than ninety per cent of the poems that masquerade as lyrics. All of them have grace, design and a supple melodic line. Johns is a genuine singer when he cares to be. Out of the company of Others, these rhymes prove it—and none of them more positively than this poem where meaning and music are inextricably interknit:

THE INTERPRETER

In the very early morning when the light was low She got all together and she went like snow, Like snow in the springtime on a sunny hill, And we were only frightened and can't think still.

We can't think quite that the katydids and frogs And the little crying chickens and the little grunting hogs, And the other living things that she spoke for to us Have nothing more to tell her since it happened thus.

She never is around for any one to touch, But of ecstasy and longing she too knew much . . . And always when any one has time to call his own She will come and be beside him as quiet as a stone.

Turn back to *Others* again; to the agonized posturing of John Rodker and Alice Groff, to the awkward artifice of Pitts Sanborn and Frances Gregg, to the attenuated preciosity of Robert Alden Sanborn and Wallace Stevens. I quote from the last-named this illustrative decoration entitled:

THE FLORIST WEARS KNEE-BREECHES

My flowers are reflected In your mind As you are reflected in your glass.

When you look at them,
There is nothing in your mind
Except the reflections
Of my flowers.
But when I look at them
I see only the reflections
In your mind,
And not my flowers.
It is my desire
To bring roses,
And place them before you
In a white dish.

Stevens, a man of genuine talent, cannot get over his own too-intellectual involutions. And yet, apart from Kreymborg and Johns, there are two contributors who make this haphazard anthology important. They are Adelaide Crapsey and Carl Sandburg. With Sandburg. who is here evidently by the accident of technique and because of a liberal sense of comradeship, I have already dealt in a previous chapter. His "Child" and "Statistics" are so far above their neighbors as to seem a cruel commentary on their surroundings. So with Adelaide Crapsey's "Cinquains," a new form, reminiscent of the hokku: a five-line verse invented by this shortlived poet. In the collection of her few brief poems, Verse (The Manas Press, 1915), there is a sincerity of emotion and perfection of craft that proclaims the genius. In his informative foreword. Claude Bragdon reviews Adelaide Crapsey's exiled life and tragic death at Saranac Lake where her window looked down at the graveyard— "'Trudeau's Garden,' she called it, with a grim-gay irony." "Perfection," writes Bragdon, "was the passion of her life. . . . Here, forbidden the work her metrical study (Analysis of English Metrics) entailed,

these poems grew—flowers of a battlefield of the spirit." Like her predecessor, Emily Dickinson, of whom she reminds one in her compact poignance, she achieves a brevity that is sharp without being astringent, a warm condensation that is precise but never parsimonious. Here are four of her "Cinquains"—those sensitive verses that illustrate her tender exactness of touch:

TRIAD

These be
Three silent things:
The falling snow . . . the hour
Before the dawn . . . the mouth of one
Just dead.

SUSANNA AND THE ELDERS

"Why do
You thus devise
Evil against her?" "For that,
She is beautiful, delicate;
Therefore."

THE GRAND CANYON

By Zeus!
Shout word of this
To the eldest dead! Titans,
Gods, Heroes, come who have once more
A home!

THE WARNING

Just now,
Out of the strange
Still dusk . . . as strange, as still . . .
A white moth flew. Why am I grown
So cold?

In "Song," "Expenses," "Mad Song," "The Lonely Death," there is this same double burden of loveliness and loneliness, moments of uncomplaining pathos. And here, in two lines, is an even more penetrative meditation:

ON SEEING WEATHER-BEATEN TREES

Is it as plainly in our living shown, By slant and twist, which way the wind hath blown?

It would be unfair to conclude this consideration of Others without an enthusiastic mention of Helen Hoyt's excellences, Horace Holley's "Hertha" and William Carlos Williams' "Tract," a set of delightfully whimsical directions for the proper performance of a funeral. Williams, more than most of these irreconcilables, has a harsh flavor that personifies him. The ensuing volume emphasizes this. But before I proceed to the second anthology of this group I desire to digress for a moment and include in this consideration the most advanced of the "movements," the Spectrist school.

In 1916 poetry was enjoying "boom times." Poetry magazines were breaking out everywhere. Prizes were blossoming on every bush; anthologies were thicker than office-seekers in Washington or Webster's Unabridged Dictionary. It was the time of manifestos, movements, departures, schools. The Cubists, Futurists, Imagists, Impressionists, Vorticists had all taken a hand at rejuvenating the staid and perplexed Muse. And so, in November, the literary world accepted, with a mixture of complacence and sophistication, a book of poetic experiments entitled Spectra (Mitchell Kennerley, 1916). There was a properly cryptic dedication to Remy de Gourmont by Emanuel Morgan (described as an American

painter who had studied in Paris but had not succeeded) and a characteristic prose preface by the other half of the school. Anne Knish ("a Hungarian woman who had written for European journals and had published a volume of poems in Russian under a Latin title"). This preface disclosed, with the essential vagueness and more than the usual detail, the Spectrist philosophy, the theory that "the theme of a poem is to be regarded as a prism, upon which the colorless white light of infinite existence falls and is broken up into glowing, beautiful and intelligible hues. In its second sense, the term Spectric relates to the reflex vibrations of physical sight, and suggests the luminous appearance which is seen after exposure of the eye to intense light, and (by analogy) the after-colors of the poet's initial vision. In its third sense, Spectric connotes the overtones, adumbrations, or spectres which for the poet haunt all objects both of the seen and the unseen world,—those shadowy projections, sometimes grotesque, which, hovering around the real, give to the real its full ideal significance and its poetic worth." Furthermore, the preface explained, "the reflex of the poet's sight should sustain the original perception with a haunting keenness. The insubstantiality of the poet's spectres should touch with a tremulous vibrancy of ultimate fact the reader's sense of the immediate theme." This sober and scientific-sounding prolog did what the poems alone might never have accomplished.

Within a few months, the Spectrists had arrived! Others, A Magazine of the New Verse, devoted its entire January 1917 number to Spectra; William Marion Reedy, after private commendations of this new and "virile school," published his enthusiasms in his Reedy's Mirror; John Gould Fletcher wrote of their "vividly memorable

lines"; an erudite essayist in *The Forum* analyzed and exalted the poems, which were headed (not with such ordinary things as titles) but with opus numbers; *The Little Review* requested poems and published them with gusto and congratulations. Disciples announced themselves overnight—the battlefield of "this most daring of the new tendencies" was clearly won. Revolutionary poets proved their radicalism by excoriating those of their fellows who refused to recognize the advent of a new power in literature; reviewers and undergraduates deserted their fixed stars to gape at this new and brilliant constellation. . . . Here is one of Emanuel Morgan's most celebrated separations of "the rays which recombine and focus in the reader's brain":

OPUS 14

Beside the brink of dream
I had put out my willow-roots and leaves
As by a stream
Too narrow for the invading greaves
Of Rome in her trireme . . .
Then you came—like a scream
Of beeves.

And here is one of Anne Knish's adumbrations:

OPUS 195

Her soul was freckled
Like a bald head
Of a jaundiced Jewish banker.
Her hair and featurous face
Withered like
An albino boa-constrictor.
She thought she resembled the Mona Lisa.
This demonstrates the futility of thinking.

And "Opus 88" of Emanuel Morgan, which ran in the "Spectric number" of Others, ends thus:

The drunken heart is as full of hops as a red squirrel . . .

There is a stone wall, leading to a motherly tree, Which clicks with the flickering caress.

And parts for the leap—

And you, beloved,

Are a nut.

It seems incredible today that such an obvious absurdity could be taken seriously. Yet it was not until after America had entered the war that the bold Intelligentzia realized how pitifully they had revealed themselves and how easily they had been tricked. For Anne Knish received a captain's commission and went to France as Arthur Davison Ficke. And Emanuel Morgan (the originator of the Spectrist theory) confessed that he had determined to form an ultra-modern school of poetry in order to enjoy the antics and reactions of the selfconfessed "moderns," that the name of the new school was suggested by a program of the Russian Ballet that lay open at Le Spectre de la Rose and that his name was Witter Bynner. . . . A gay masquerade, a hoax twice as interesting as Barnum's Cardiff giant and ten times as effective in its revelation of the truth of the eminent P. T.'s most famous epigram. All the windy explanations that followed Bynner's disclosure of his audacious joke have not obscured the brightness of this sprightly chapter in our literary renascence.

In the second anthology of Others—1917 (Alfred A. Knopf) one suspects Kreymborg the editor of desiring to rouse more antagonism than before, not only among

those antiquarians who believe that the sonnet form may outlast Futurism, but among those anarchs whose poetic radicalism expresses itself in capitalized emotions and lower-case letters at the beginning of each line. Kreymborg does not even wait for an argument; he plants a chip on his shoulder (or, to be more precise, on the flamboyant cover) by inserting the definite article in his subtitle, "An Anthology of The New Verse." And yet there is a sly reason for its employment, since the most definite thing about the volume is that article. I turn to the first poem in the book; a study, I venture to say, in differential calculus, entitled "Ing." The first dozen lines shape themselves thus:

Ing? Is it possible to mean ing? Suppose

for the termination in g

a disoriented

of the simple fractures

in sleep.
Soporific

has accordingly a value for soap

so present to

sew pieces.

And p says: Peace is.

This, however, is only one phase of Mr. Arensberg's gift. The reader who is inclined to a more lush lyricism may prefer the poet when he turns to the poignant painting of landscapes, as in the lines entitled "For 'Shady Hill,' Cambridge, Mass." I ruthlessly detach two colorful segments:

A drink into home use indicates early Italian. Other wise

"the element of how keeps insides. Nothing has now."

But after the carpet whose usury can eat thirds?

Blunders are belted in cousins. Use what listens on Sunday; and catchy elms will oxidize pillows. Any news is original in absence. . . .

which have the butters of extra broken on badges biting a needle to partners if only the bridge is fluent let it not nice.

This, it must be admitted, is slightly derivative. There are suggestions of a disorganized and ultra-perverse Beardsley, scraps from The Yellow Book rewritten by Gertrude Stein. Possibly there is more originality in Wallace Stevens' "The Worm at Heaven's Gate" (in spite of its Shakespearian tang), in Miss Moore's lucid lines concerning "In This Age of Hard Trying Nonchalance is Good, And —", or in Mr. Kreymborg's more precise and almost mathematical magic:

We have a one-room home.
You have a two-room, three-room, four-room.
We have a one-room home.
because a one-room home is all we have.
We have a one-room home because a one-room home holds all we have.
We have a one-room home because we do not want
a two-room, three-room, four-room.
If we had a two-room, three-room, four-room we would need more than a one-room home.
We have a one-room home.
We like a one-room home.

It is refreshing to see, in this age of fire and intensity, that there is at least one group of artists who live to make

merely beautiful and precious things, such as the tremulous lines already quoted; that there still exist some poets who are content to make elaborately artificial decorations. for whom life is too vigorous and health too vulgar. I have said that, when the breath of Whitman swept like a great gust over the fields of poetry, the affectations, the soft sighings were blown away: that, confronted with this new and more human singing, the limp lilies had withered and the lithe, lank Liliths had picked up their Burne-Ionesian skirts and scurried off. But, thanks to Messrs. and Mesdames Arensberg, Cannell, Loy, D'Orge, et al., the tradition has been revived. The lilies, tenderly transplanted, have been made to grow into bewildering, multicolored mushrooms: the Liliths have studied Freud and can misquote Havelock Ellis at a moment's notice. Their impulses are not so much nostalgic as a glorification of the neurasthenic; their Muse is at home nowhere so much as in the psychopathic ward. The odor that their work exhales is that of synthetic roses decaying in a curtained, candle-lit room. It is the art of evasion, of eroticism gone to seed, of a perfumed and purposeless revolt.

The volume, however, is less consistent than its unwritten code. The decrease in numbers is, in itself, a decided improvement; instead of the thirty-five charter members less than half—seventeen, to be exact—are here represented. And the newcomers are a welcome addition—particularly David O'Neil, who is pictorially forceful even though, in contradistinction to Arensberg, he is still bound by the malignant fetters of grammar, thought and punctuation. Maxwell Bodenheim is another who fortunately fails to live up to the program of novelty. His delicacies are daringly clear and his images are fresh without attempting the latest heresy. Bodenheim's sensi-

tivity to words makes him especially expert in his use of the verbal nuance. His first volume, for some strange reason just about to be published, will attract no little attention, if only because of such poems as "The Ghost Sword," "Hill-Side Tree," "Friendship" and this intimate picture, written more recently:

FACTORY-GIRL

Why are your eyes like dry brown flower-pods,
Still, gripped by the memory of lost petals?
I feel that, if I touched them,
They would crumble to falling brown dust,
And you would stand with blindness revealed.
Yet you would not shrink, for your life
Has been long since memorized,
And your eyes would only melt out against its high walls.
Besides, in the making of boxes
Sprinkled with crude forget-me-nots,
One is curiously blessed if one's eyes are dead.

Bodenheim has no superior in the whimsical-grotesque. His compositions are often as peculiarly decorative as the Beardsley-like fantasy of

DEATH

I shall walk down the road.
I shall turn and feel upon my feet
The kisses of death like scented rain.
For death is a black slave with little silver birds
Perched in a sleeping wreath upon his head.
He will tell me, his voice like jewels
Dropped into a satin bag,
How he has tiptoed after me down the road,
His heart made a dark whirlpool with longing for me.
Then he will graze me with his hands;
And I shall be one of the sleeping silver birds
Between the cold waves of his hair, as he tiptoes on.

honesty is lost in pages of i platitudes are unable to disguise With the exceptions noted, on discursive and falsetto abstracti essentially simple minds. One I feeling that one has witnessed t mallow, the careful probing of i

. . AND OTHERS

Among the younger men who have responded to the new tendencies in art and the sciences, there are several whose books are interesting studies in contrast and contradiction. Bound by a natural love for the established, they conduct sporadic flirtations with the untried; clinging with a tremulous faith to the old gods, they offer up an occasional furtive sacrifice to new idols. Thus their work seems torn by an inherent reverence for authority and an illicit desire for novelty. The result is an uncertain and usually half-hearted conflict in which neither impulse predominates; a battle without a victory, a struggle in which no one is defeated but the reader.

These speculations apply to a fast-growing coterie of writers that come to grief by attempting to be both bourgeois and bolshevik. But it also includes some of our more mature and experienced craftsmen. Many of our best known and most respectable poets, following the lead of Sidney Lanier and William Vaughn Moody, have been caught in the strange currents that have almost engulfed them. Uneasy in their conservatism, they have grown to be dissatisfied traditionalists; vacillating between a romanticism of which they have grown tired and a realism which they distrust, they falter; unable to choose either one and lacking the power to combine both. see this indecision in the overstressed virility of John G. Neihardt; in the often eloquent but still more often grandiloquent rhetoric of Josephine Preston Peabody; in the sotto voce radicalism of Percy Mackaye; in the

cramped nobilities of George Sterling; in the abrupt changes from the free and animated classicism to the febrile grotesques of Arthur Davison Ficke; in the nobly dignified but reminiscent blank verse of John Erskine; in the restless and troubled voluminousness of John Curtis Underwood; in the disturbed academic fluency of William Ellery Leonard, Cale Young Rice, Brian Hooker, Hermann Hagedorn. These men produce, for the most part, what has been called "anonymous poetry," a poetry that has, in spite of certain excellent qualities. little trace of the individual, and practically no stamp of personality or place. Even so naturally eloquent a poet as Edwin Markham has been unable to regain the heights achieved in his memorable The Man with the Hoe. In his subsequent Virgilia, The Shoes of Happiness and Other Poems he lapsed into narrative verse in the manner of John Hay, rhapsodies in Swinburnian measures and echoes of "the grand manner."

If the failure to assimilate unstable standards is most evident in the older writers, the desire to respond to every shift is equally obvious in the younger generation—a desire which is out of all proportion to the performance. In the effort to be the oracle of the moment, what is uppermost in their work is the effort. Caught in conflicting tides they drift now with this current, now with that, reaching nowhere; changing their goal with each new wind. One can find dozens of such chartless adventurers every month; they loom briefly on the horizon in the poetry magazines, in the Poetry Societies and in volumes obviously published at the author's expense.

The case of Conrad Aiken, a more than ordinarily gifted poet, is typical. Facile, energetic, critical, equipped

with a strong feeling for verbal color and musical subtlety, it has seemed impossible for him to rise above either his own dexterity or his enthusiasm for some one else's discoveries. Each of his four successive books have held out the promise of a succeeding coördinated and distinctive volume—a promise that has never been kept. The intrusion of outside influences, or his too-great affection for his masters, or a sex myopia, or possibly a hyperaesthetic astigmatism, has prevented him from seeing clearly what he tries so anxiously to reveal. What stands out as the most prominent of Aiken's characteristics is his way of patterning after first one and then another of his contemporaries; at times he leans so heavily upon them that their strength becomes his weakness. In Earth Triumphant and Other Tales in Verse (The Macmillan Co., 1914) the indebtedness to Masefield is crippling. Entire poems proceed not merely with something close to the Englishman's idiom but with his identical method and mechanics. An example:

He drank, he cursed, he flung the world off spinning, He fought three times, a girl the cause each time; He broke Jake Granz's jaw to stop him grinning, Whirled stars about his head and made them chime; He got in with a gang whose work was crime, Helped crack a jewelry store, then half killed one Who called him cheat at cards, and pulled a gun . . .

At the stage doors he met with murmured curses, He waltzed the queens away, he had his will; He laughed to see the sports look black as hearses, White blooded things! Did they have hands to kill? Touch of soft fingers on him made him thrill, He strode, his nostrils quivered stiff with scorn, He wondered why these little men were born. . . .

332 The New Era in American Poetry and, in another vein:

Plausibly sweet the music came to her, Through many doors, most plausible and sweet, Setting some subtle pulse in her astir, Smoothing in song her heart's erratic beat. Dizziness came, unstrung her knees, her feet, And she sank down a space upon her bed, Shutting her eyes, mad reelings in her head.

This imitative habit of speech obscures what was undoubtedly searching and straightforward in Aiken. At its best, Earth Triumphant has many moments of loveliness and sincerity; at its worst it sinks into a borrowing of banalities. The title-poem is eighty-three interminable pages of lugubrious sentimentalizing with a climax that has been so long prepared that it completely misses fire; "Romance" is an account of a Fall River Line amour that might have been written jointly by Laura Jean Libbey and Robert W. Service; "Youth" is the tale of a Masefieldian bruiser-Don Juan who leaves the harlot city and, after sixty pages, is regenerated by a country girl in a white dress!

There are times when the lines descend to a bathos so humorous as to be incredible.

He looked on meretricious clothing And straightway he was sick with loathing; And while his friends perspired with bliss, At thinking of a chorine's kiss, Lo, beauty like a lightning came To strike this ugliness with flame. . . .

There is even a descent to philosophizing as flat as:

The man, he mused, who once knows love No baser lust can ever move.

Not infrequently, in phrases like "the bliss of sin," "a red madness and a riotous pain," "breaking his heart with ecstasies," "more lusts, more dizzy laughter," we hear still older and more insincere echoes. But the promise of better things is here.

The next volume, Turns and Movies (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916), is both a surprise and a disappointment. The old influence is almost gone, but a new one appears; Masefield is exchanged for Masters. Aiken, with the realist in the ascendant, is still groping; his touch, however, is surer, his curiosity broader, his music more varied. But he is still unable to find his own way, or to find it alone. The most ambitious part of this volume is the least authentic; it attempts to be a "Spoon River Anthology" of the vaudeville stage; but, unlike its famous predecessor, it is a hectic and unreal piece of work. Aiken might contend that it is a hectic and unreal world that he is trying to portray and, to some extent, this defense might acquit him. But that very method calls for an unusually skilful restraint; even the cheapest of the burlesque "wheels" is not packed with the abnormalities, the degenerates and pat melodramas that the author has crowded in one short series. The trouble with Aiken's vaudeville world is that of his everyday but equally theatrical world; both are false not because they are vicious, but because they are exaggerated to the point of the tawdriest fifteen-cent fiction.

The less conspicuous half of the book is made of entirely different material and handled in a far more skilful way. There is vitality and invention here and, not infrequently, a nice choice of epithet. His music continues to develop new effects in rhythm and balance. "Evensong" has several distinguished moments and

"Discordants" has a beauty of movement difficult to match in modern verse. This is the first section of "Discordants":

Music I heard with you was more than music, And bread I broke with you was more than bread; Now that I am without you, all is desolate; All that was once so beautiful is dead.

Your hands once touched this table and this silver, And I have seen your fingers hold this glass. These things do not remember you, beloved,—And yet your touch upon them will not pass.

For it was in my heart you moved among them, And blessed them with your hands and with your eyes; And in my heart they will remember always,— They knew you once, O beautiful and wise.

With the next volume a new influence declares itself: both Masefield and Masters are discarded for Dr. Sigmund Freud. In The Jig of Forslin (The Four Seas Co., 1916) Mr. Aiken explains that the book is based on the Freudian psychology, that his theme is "the process of vicarious wish fulfilment by which civilized man enriches his circumscribed life and obtains emotional balance." This, of course, is nothing more than the process by which every artist has projected himself; and to say that by reading, listening to music, witnessing a play or dreaming a dream, one "escapes from the monotony of existence" is to repeat not merely a psychological truism but an ordinary tea-table platitude. When Aiken leaves his theory, which he frequently does, the book assumes larger proportions-principally because of the adroit nuances in his music. But, in spite of the "novel" program outlined in the preface, the impulse of these visions which come to Forslin as he sits dreaming in his room is as old-fashioned as the Rogers groups. It is the outcropping of the same spurious and sentimental realism that resulted in wax flowers under glass at the one extreme, and the perfumed, "poetic" passions of Arthur Symons at the other. The Jig of Forslin blossoms largely from the latter offshoot. There is the same pastiche of pre-Raphaelitism; the same obsession with dim and delicate harlotry; the same veneer of artificial and artistic decadence.

Death, among violins and paper roses,
Leering upon a waltz, in evening dress,
Taking his lady's arm with bow and smile...
This is unreal. Let us pull off our gloves:
Open the doors, and take the air a while.

Death would be sweet, if one might poison music—Feel a rich rhythm, with its freight of languor, Feeding under the heart with every beat:

Faint with a waltz in the blood,

Laugh and topple and fall,

Feel the cold marble flush beneath soft feet. . . .

The book never sinks to the level of the commonplace; it is splashed with brilliant colors and a bizarre beauty. But the most bizarre thing about it is its pretense of being a new and living utterance when it is really a voice from the tomb. It is, no doubt, an exquisite and handsomely decorated tomb. But its inmates are just as dead as the primmest professors in the most Puritan cemetery. And, to be considered a daring innovator, one must resurrect something older than the 'nineties.

What is even more disastrous to Aiken's development is his growing preoccupation with the back-alleys

of sex. The sick strain that persisted in the previous volumes dominates this one. Its pages swarm with literary lamias, prostitutes, pimps, amatory murderers, suicides, syphilitics, cheap hotel bedrooms, peg-house debaucheries.

Music from concertinas in an alley,
And cats with slow green eyes,—
A thousand nights have died as this night dies.
The stars dance out, the air blows warm tonight,
The girls are all in white.
Bargains are struck, they laugh, they glide away,
Some to love and some to lust.
In smoky lounges tired musicians play.
The harlot's slippers are grey with dust. . . .

This is Aiken's chief neurosis; he cannot shake off what might be called an adolescent underworld complex. It makes *The Jig of Forslin* not only an object-lesson in poetic principles but an illuminating study in introversion.

In Nocturne of Remembered Spring (The Four Seas Co., 1917) Aiken seems further inhibited by an increasing weariness; try as he will, he cannot rouse himself to lustiness for more than a moment. The most vigorous notes are in the earlier verses, included as companion pieces to the first volume. An old and subtle perfume has been injected into the poet's ink; he writes as if he were drugged with the pale wine of There is an undoubted glamor here, but other men. it is that of a soiled loveliness: the evocation of beauty is both moony and morbid. That Mr. Aiken, beginning as a frank disciple of Masefield, has developed into a belated echo of the 'nineties is not, in itself, either interesting or important. But one regards him as a type of poet that is distressingly periodical, and one feels toward him as one does toward a friend who has been a disappointment; a failure not in himself but of our own hopes for him. Aiken himself seems to have shared this disappointment, for the volume is tired to the point of lethargy. No one would expect many thrills from verse whose chief impetus is ennui; and so in Nocturne of Remembered Spring we have what any one might expect. This is how the title-poem ends:

Do you remember, a certain day,
Or evening rather,—spring evening long ago,—
We talked of death, and love, and time, and truth . . .
And said such wise things, things that amused us so . . .?
How foolish we were, who thought ourselves so wise!—
And then we laugh, with shadows in our eyes.

And this is how the "Episode in Grey" begins:

So, to begin with, dust blows down the street, In lazy clouds and swirls, and after that Tatters of paper and straws, and waves of heat, And leaves plague-bitten; under a tree a cat Sprawls in the sapless grass, and shuts his eye. And sitting behind closed shutters you hear a beat Of melancholy steps go slowly by. . . .

And so it proceeds—a fatigued reminder of *The Jig* of Forslin faintly enlivened by an infusion of T. S. Eliot's conversational idiom. Even the poignance seems on the point of falling asleep; the dusk grows heavy; the shadows blur; everything dissolves in a mist of forgetfulness.

Well, I am tired . . . tired of all these years, The hazy mornings, the noons, the misty evenings; Tired of the spring, tired of the fall,— The music starts again, I have heard it all. . . .

The Charnel Rose (The Four Seas Co., 1918) is a slight variation on his worn theme. It is mainly repetition—half-artful, half-artificial. The strain persists. There is an air of twilight, rain, and boredom over all the work. . And in this atmosphere Mr. Aiken seems to have grown old before attaining actual manhood, like something that starts decaying just as it is about to blossom. His attitude to life seems almost the exact opposite of his vigorous compatriots'; while they are trying to wrest beauty from the rocky facts of life, he is content to lie back on the pillows of a dreamy disillusion. Let them shriek themselves hoarse, he seems to say. While an inexpressible world sounds its barbaric yawp, Mr. Aiken expresses himself in a refined and musical yawn.

An entire essay might be written around a comparison of the work of Conrad Aiken and Roy Helton, especially the way in which each of them regards the city. Helton is a newcomer; a stranger to poetry societies, to poetry courses, even to the ubiquitous poetry magazines. And yet he has, like Sandburg, more poetic feeling for the America we live in than eighty per cent. of our craftsmen whose patriotism is so easily minted and so quickly sold. He lacks the incisive power of many of them; he falls frequently into a careless and outworn rhetoric, he has still to command an idiom of his own. But he has already achieved an inflection; Outcasts in Beulah Land (Henry Holt & Co., 1918) is a personal and distinctive volume if only for the author's unusual themes and the casual way in which he has treated them. With a rude talent for song and the rhymed narrative which was doubtless his birthright as a Southern mountaineer, Roy Helton takes an incompetent clerk or a tired mill-girl, a musing half-wit trudging down Vine Street or a city boy and a turn of twine, a corner crossing or a chop suey interior, and makes ballads out of them as romantic as they are real. The title-poem is the most ambitious piece in the book the triple tale of a distinguished art collector, an old blind beggar hung for murder, and Fish-house Mary, a dead prostitute, who meet on the threshold of Hellbut it is, in spite of its originality of theme, one of the least original in effect. It reminds one alternatively of a slangy John Davidson and a macabre John Masefield. Helton is most persuasive in the shorter poems of urban life. "On the Fire Escape" is as potent as many of the Kentucky ballads; in "Youth" a guttersnipe fishing up broken ornaments out of an ash-can becomes the elfin embodiment of joy. In "Aesthetic Symbols" a crone with rusty black bonnet on her head and an icecream cone in either hand leans upon an iron stairway and is as glamorous to the poet as The Blessed Damozel. And in "Mazie," the eternal feminine is, for all her surroundings, scarcely less virginal than Eve. Even the meter of the verse prompts the comparison, for it seems, at first glance, little more than a half-ironic parody of the magical

Eve, with her basket, was Deep in the bells and grass, Wading in bells and grass Up to her knees, Picking a dish of sweet Berries and plums to eat, Down in the bells and grass Under the trees.

Thus the opening of Hod "Mazie" begins:

Lonely-eyed Ma
In the old Auton
Dreaming, ah, d
Dream of some a
Dreaming, ah, d
Strange dreams
By the shy, hidd
Dear ladie

There in the Aut Lonely-eyed Maz With but a dime At the day's end; As her need bade Licked off that flo From her brass fi Then licked her fi Wantonly lingerin

But after a few lines one for

W.,

Roy Helton

34I

"Aunt Josie's Chatty Letter," "Three Smiles on Vine Street," or this sudden illumination:

Last night, as through the crowd on Market Street, A new-made soldier proudly swung along, Guiding that grey-eyed wonder called his girl, Whose face turned up to him in silent song: I marked, above those gay young hearts in tune, The unimportant beauty of the moon.

Still undiscriminating in his enthusiasms, Helton is deaf to the finer shades of the spoken word, and particularly to the difference between the slang that is creative and the vulgarism that springs from a mere lazy parroting. Sometimes in his very desire to descend to a colloquial level, the poet falls into a flat garrulity and even (as in such pieces of sentimentalism as "Steeplechase" and "Opal") sinks to the sugared cheapness of a vaudeville "serio-comic." He is prone to tag racy stories with a glib comment that has more than a passing resemblance to the despised New England moral maxim. But it is an impulse to which he will undoubtedly yield less in his second volume, an inclination that he has successfully throttled in most of the sharper poems in his first book. Here is an unusually brief example of how keen his visual power is; a concentrated short story where sympathy and satire are nicely balanced:

IN PASSING

Through the dim window, I could see The little room—a sordid square Of helter-skelter penury: Piano, whatnot, splintered chair. . . . LING HAG COILE

Grimly she ber. To stab the ker. A child's first i Before her on the

This first volume, in s sodes and certain awkwa of an indigenous vigor. of that energetic Americ make our literature more

Nothing could offer a ject as well as in style, to the poetry of Willard Wa arrivals in the lists. His fi semane (E. P. Dutton & gious, and yet it is fresh at modern in treatment and personality of Christ intin in the Rilly Sunday manual

Wiliard Wattles

343

RETURN

Wise man, wise man, Fingers and thumbs, Which is the way That Jesus comes?

Wise man, wise man, Rabbi, priest, Did you ever see a man On such a poor beast?

Wise man, wise man, I saw a lame child; And when he came by Jesus smiled.

Jesus, Jesus, How do you come? "To those who are halt And blind and dumb."

My knee was sprung And I couldn't see, So I climbed up high In a jujube tree.

Jesus, Jesus, What are you worth? "The sun and the moon And the little round earth."

Jesus, Jesus,
Sing me a song,
"I can't stop now,
For the road's too long."

Jesus, Jesus, Go along, Lord; My knee is straight As the governor's sword.

Jesus, Jesus, Go along before To a high house With a silver door.

But I'll stop first To clean my feet, And then sit down By the chimney-seat.

And Jesus will laugh And say it's good That I've moved into His neighborhood.

Digressing for a moment to consider the far West locally, it becomes apparent at once that no one has pioneered more successfully than Bret Harte did a generation or so ago. For a while it seemed that Joaquin Miller's gaudy and over-emphasized manner (the breezy blood-and-thunder that led literary England to appraise Miller as the typical sombrero-wearing, Indian-hunting American) might captivate many of our trans-Mississippi writers. But there was a quick swing back to naturalism, and such things as Lomax's remarkable collection of cowboy songs helped to bring the true Western ballad to a position of dignity. Compare, for example, the false tang and artifice of Arthur Chapman's Out Where the West Begins to the real gusto in the volumes of Henry Herbert Knibbs and Badger Clark. two books, Riders of the Stars and Songs of the Outlands (both of them published by Houghton Mifflin Co.). are particularly enlivening and indigenous. Even his publisher's crippling classification of Knibbs as "the Robert W. Service of Arizona" has not hurt him. With a swing and fidelity that Service never could attain.

Knibbs strikes out song after song that is fresh, hotblooded and high-spirited. Without taking himself seriously, his work has a seriousness that many of his Eastern studio-rangers might envy. Here, in a lighthearted catch, is Knibbs' own attitude toward his art:

The wind of dawn has swept the plains,
And the sun runs over the purple sage.
Gone is the rack of the winter rains,
Leaving the hill like a faery page
Of a book that is old, but ever new,
And fresh as the wild-flowers sweet with dew.
Gosh! I'm ridin' close to the fence and low,
And strainin' my buttins, eh, Johnny-Jo?

It ain't no use for to talk like that;
It's second-hand scenery made to print.
Just hand me my ole gray puncher hat
And them spurs and quirt; do you get the hint?
For I got to ride easy with elbows high,
Mebby not style, but she sure has go;
We'll all git to Heaven by-and-by,
But we'll travel outdoors; eh, Johnny-Jo?

Ridgely Torrence is another who has caught not a little of the color of certain localities—particularly those of the dark belt. "The Bird and the Tree" and "Eye-Witness" are poems that are representative of a section, moving with an eloquence of their own. His volume of native one-act dramas (Granny Maumee and Other Plays) contains two of the most poignant and quiet tragedies of negro life in American literature; the title-play and "The Rider of Dreams" owe their power not only to Torrence's gift as a poet but to his sympathy as folk-lorist.

Turning abruptly to the more congested centers, we see there are many besides Wheelock and Brody who are trying to express the city. And it is not the proverhial lure of the metropolis with its antiphonal music that istrigues them, but its bewildering and unresolved cacoulonies. One of the best examples of the distillusioned celebrants of New York is Max Endicoff. In his volume (The Snarling City. Hillacre Bookhouse, 1917) a new voice struggles under many echoes. Sometimes the utterance is confused and coarsened with the jargon of recent psychology; sometimes it is high-pitched and hysterical (as in "The Traders") with a sophomoric intensity. But frequently (as in "The Sea-Liner Docking," "The Woolworth Building," "The Public Library") we listen to a clear and original speech flavored with a pungent accent sharpened by irony. Several of the pictures in his quietly mordant vein are memorable; I particularly recall "The Fixture" and "The Retired Acrobat." There are other poems in the volume that are more highly colored, but I select the following for quotation as an embodiment of Endicoff's various quali-It shows not only what he has done to give the building of a skyscraper new magic; it suggests what he may do with things he has not yet attempted.

THE EXCAVATION

Clusters of electric bulbs
Like giant chrysanthemums
Paint the black cavern
With streaks and blots
Of faded yellow.
In grotesque mimicry
The monstrous shadows
Ape each movement of the toiling men.

The stale, pungent odor of unpacked earth Tickles the nostrils.

Through the wood-plank roof
The dull-booming rumble
Of scampering traffic
Trickles in—
But is swallowed up
By the harsh purr of the drill
As it bites frenziedly
Into the dogged rock.

And overhead, unseen, A mountain of stone is kept upright By a slender steel beam And a theory.

But it has remained for one reared far from our chaotic centers to appraise most poignantly the mingled squalor and beauty of our crowded streets. Ghetto and Other Poems (B. W. Huebsch, 1918) Lola Ridge brings a fresh background to set off her sensitive evaluations: her early life in Australia has doubtless enabled her to draw the American city with such an unusual sense of perspective. The city dominates her book; but the whole modern industrial world surges beneath it. "The Song of Iron," with its glorification of Labor, is a veritable paean of triumph. And yet out of these majestic lines, the still small voice of the poet makes itself heard; a strangely attenuated voice with a tense accent: a fineness that, seeming fragile, is like the delicacy of a thin steel spring. Nowhere does this distinction of utterance maintain itself so strikingly as in the title-poem. "The Ghetto" is at once personal in its piercing sympathy and, in spite of a rhetorical anti-climax in the shape of an envoy, epical in its sweep. It is studded with images that are surpris-

ing and yet never strained or irrelevant; it glows with a color that is barbaric, exotic and as local as Grand Street. In this poem Miss Ridge achieves the sharp line, the arresting and fixing of motion, the condensed clarity advertised by the Imagists—with far more human passion than they ever betrayed. Observe this description of Sodos, the old saddle-maker:

Time spins like a crazy dial in his brain,
And night by night
I see the love-gesture of his arm
In its green-greasy coat-sleeve
Circling the Book,
And the candles gleaming starkly
On the blotched-paper whiteness of his face—
Like a mis-written psalm. . . .
Night by night
I hear his lifted praise
Like a broken whinnying
Before the Lord's shut gate.

Or turn to the picture of the aged scholar who smiles at the "stuffed blue shape backed by a nickel star," smiles

with the pale irony
Of one who holds
The wisdom of the Talmud stored away
In his mind's layendar.

Or the lyric ecstasy in the same poem that suddenly interrupts with:

Nude glory of the moon!

That leaps like an athlete on the bosoms of the young girls, stripped of their linens;

Stroking their breasts that are smooth and cool as mother-of-pearl.

Till the nipples tingle and burn as though little lips plucked at them.

They shudder and grow faint.

And their ears are filled as with a delirious rhapsody,

That Life, like a drunken player,

Strikes out of their clear, white bodies as out of ivory keys.

And this is "The Ghetto's" exquisite cadence:

Without, the frail moon
Worn to a silvery tissue,
Throws a faint glamour on the roofs,
And down the shadowy spires
Lights tip-toe out . . .
Softly as when lovers close street doors.

Out of the Battery
A little wind
Stirs idly—like an arm
Trailed over a boat's side in dalliance—
Rippling the smooth dead surface of the heat.
And Hester Street,
Like a forlorn woman over-borne
By many babies at her teats,
Turns on her trampled bed to meet the day.

Elsewhere, the same dignity of utterance is maintained. Frequently it expresses itself in a direct, colloquial idiom. But more often it turns the straightforward accents into an unearthly magic with nothing more supernatural than an extraordinary sense of metaphor. Here (from "Faces") is one example among many:

A late snow beats
With cold white fists upon the tenements,
Hurriedly drawing blinds and shutters—
Like tall old slatterns
Pulling aprons about their heads.

.... із апотпет р

the stress of these times with In Child of the Amazon (N the intransigeant editor and ra that is social by direction ra Such splendid poems as "In (in which a five-act tragedy is and "To a Tawny Thrush" co ten by one who has achieved. b an agility and fervor of reali: lyrics that Eastman achieves h is here far more colorful and dr purposely dramatic verses. I pa song beginning "Ice is march "Conventional Life" and this interesting to compare with A Oppenheim's lines (at the begin on the same theme:

AT THE AQUA

Serene the silver fishes Stern-lipped, and pale, The level people in the air,
The people peering, peering there,
Who wander also to and fro,
And know not why or where they go,
Yet have a wonder in their eyes,
Sometimes a pale and cold surprise.

I would like to speak at some length of Eastman's vivid prose in his Enjoyment of Poetry (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), possibly the most illuminating treatise on this vexed subject that has appeared in this country. I would like to show how, in these chapters, Eastman is more actually creative than in his verse; how the essays are scholarly without being pedagogic, erudite without being bookish, free from mincing particularities, dogmatic prejudices and academic snobbery. But this is not the place for such an analysis, or even an encomium. I leave that work for others whom it may influence.

There are too many of these others to be classified in these chapters. But it is necessary to mention at least a few. Edwin Curran is one of them, and one of the strangest. A young man in his early twenties, a railroad telegrapher in the outskirts of Zanesville, Ohio, he himself has printed a little paper-bound pamphlet of thirty pages (First Poems, 1917), with this naif note: "Reviewers please include address of author and price of book (35 cents, postpaid) in notices. Author is 25, unmarried, a beginner and needs publisher. If this volume meets expenses, another, possibly better, will be issued."... One turns the pages expecting to find something in the Sweet Singer of Michigan vein, some new burlesque epic à la J. Gordon Coogler or James

or the painted hills" this r the proverbial end-of-the-yes the "earth stripped to gra ... her gnarled hills plant

> I love the earth who go To struggle with the win And bring the glorious I see earth's muscles ban And am not sad, but fee As splendidly she plung

Elsewhere there is less stra ran's brief pages are a jumb passion, platitude, bad gram Nothing that I have seen in the result of sheer inspirat There is little or no critical pe response to a mood that sweet an unconscious instrument. I does with him whatever it wisl control over the music; it co quietly ecstatic "To Future

Its exquisite and lovely petals curled;
And all the stars rained in a silver shower.
Hear! said my soul, the whistle in the gale.
And listening, came the tapping bells afar
And sweeping strings of God's immortal nightingale
Perched on a bough—or was it on a star?

This brightness of speech is manifest everwhere. It leaps out of such uneven poems as "Soldier's Epitaph" and "Sailing of Columbus" in lines like,

"We climbed the slippery alleys of the sea"

and

"The stars, like bells, flash down the silver sky; Ringing like chimes on frozen trees, or cry Along the marble ground."

It is impossible to guess whether or not sophistication will refine or amplify this poetic diction. Study and self-criticism may destroy the impulse that is so fresh because it is so unforced. And all the "schools" could do little to improve such a rhapsodic burst as:

Sentinel, break the night with a golden spear—Why does it stand out in the field like one Who clings to all the earth with craven fear, Pushing with his shoulder on the rising sun?

Sentinel, unlock the morning from its chains; Throw by the bolts from off the eastern door; Unlock that portal hingeing on the plains, And let the dawn-gate loose its golden store.

Ring out cathedral bells with glorious light. Sentinel, lift your spear and break the night!

Byron Elmore. And then one is stopped by such lines as:

We have not died. . . . Your harp is playing still; I see the moon go spinning up Troy sky, While stars shake out to music down their hill And all the clarion trumpets whistle by.

Or lines from "Autumn," where even by the "ruins of the painted hills" this new singer can find none of the proverbial end-of-the-year melancholy, but sees only the "earth stripped to grapple with the winter year . . . her gnarled hills planned for victories."

I love the earth who goes to battle now,
To struggle with the wintry whipping storm
And bring the glorious spring out from the night.
I see earth's muscles bared, her battle brow,
And am not sad, but feel her marvelous charm
As splendidly she plunges in the fight.

Elsewhere there is less strangeness and potency. Curran's brief pages are a jumble of beauty, incoherence, passion, platitude, bad grammar and great exaltation. Nothing that I have seen in years has seemed so much the result of sheer inspiration and poor schooling. There is little or no critical perception here, only a blind response to a mood that sweeps the singer as if he were an unconscious instrument. Magic takes this poet and does with him whatever it wishes. He has practically no control over the music; it controls him. Observe the quietly ecstatic "To Future Generations," the related "ove-songs scattered without title through the booklet, he music and glorified whimsicality of

Watch! said my soul, and I looked on the world; The moon fell down its golden well, a flower; Its exquisite and lovely petals carled:
And all the stars rained in a silver shower.
Hear! said my soul, the whistle in the gale.
And listening, came the tapping bells afar
And sweeping strings of God's immertal nightingsle.
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Sentinel, unlock the morning from the season. Throw by the britis know of the season to Unlock that pourse hanging on the Season And let the dawn-gare over the gritish than

Ring out calculate iste was gracem ign Sentinel, lift your spoor and inside her ingo:

The list of "new" poets might be continued for pages—and this chapter is already beyond its intended proportions. But I cannot conclude it without recording the calmly manipulated grace of Helen Hoyt, whose unaffected lines often approach the simple strength of Anna Wickham. Nor can I end without speaking of the earnest and often reckless spontaneity of Harry Kemp; the skilful sonnets and "Savage Portraits" of Don Marquis; the musical experiments of Wallace Gould; the lyric delicacy of Hortense Flexner; the power to recreate aboriginal music and the mood of the folk-song in the work of Alice Corbin.

I must also speak once more of the precocious Stephen Vincent Benét, whose Young Adventure, which is to appear shortly, will doubtless contain "Rain After a Vaudeville Show," that excellent tour de force. It is likewise necessary to mention Archie Austin Coates, whose City Tides (Doran, 1918) reveals unusual perceptions and a keen satiric sense; Charles Wharton Stork, who has not yet shaken off his academic influences; Clement Wood, who, if he ever conquers a deep-rooted tendency to plagiarize the thoughts, idioms and measures of his confrères, may sometime write a volume entirely his own; such emerging figures as Christopher Morley, John Crowe Ransome (his Poems About God will cause no little stir when they appear). Scudder Middleton, David O'Neil, Babette Deutsch, Max Michelson, Irwin Edman, Mark Turbyfill, Emanuel Carnevali, Morris Gilbert, Dorothy Dudley, Haniel Long. . . . The list could be extended for a column or more.

On every hand, from every locality, a fresh scattering of voices is heard. It is in this rich diversity that a new era in American poetry is being made manifest.

CONCLUSION—THE MELTING POT

". . . these and more, branching forth into numberless branches.

Always the free range and diversity!

Always the continent of Democracy!"

WALT WHITMAN.

In the foregoing chapters I have not tried to rate our contemporary poets in what might be considered the order of their importance, but I have placed them so as to bring out most effectively their contrasting qualities. For it is their very differences that actually reflect these States, that make present-day American poetry the vigorous and varied growth which it has so rapidly become. Dominated by no one voice or group, fostered by no single cult, this wide divergence of thought, form and expression is what has made the poetic renascence so remarkable. If there is any doubt of this rich increase it is only necessary to study this freedom from any school or schools, to observe the eloquent spontaneity of voices and compare it to the thin, specialized and local poetry before Whitman. Instead of one small stream, there are a dozen wide and rushing currents. As the country has begun to mature, the poets have grown with it and spread themselves—even geographically. New England is no longer the one literary center of America. Our poets are recording themselves and their environment in the furthest stretches of the land. Robert Frost, born in San Francisco and living in the little village of Franconia, New Hampshire; Carl Sandburg

in Maywood, Illinois; James Oppenheim, born in Minnesota and brought up in New York City; Sara Teasdale in St. Louis, Missouri; Vachel Lindsay in Springfield, Illinois; Edgar Lee Masters, born at Garnet, Kansas, and writing in the maelstrom of Chicago; William Rose Benét in Port Washington, Long Island; Amy Lowell in Brookline, Massachuetts; Aiken in Boston; C. E. S. Wood in Oregon; John Hall Wheelock in New York—there seems to be no corner of the country that is not alive with singers.

Glance also at the various racial colors of the names themselves: Frost, Oppenheim, Lindsay, Masters, Sandburg, Lowell, Giovannitti, Robinson, Neihardt, Benét, Pound, Kreymborg, Endicoff, Eastman, Tietjens. What a medley of clans and nationalities! America is truly a melting pot in a poetic as well as an ethnic sense. For out of this many-voiced and differently-pitched choir is rising a harmonic music, a homogeneity in spite of its seemingly confused counterpoint. Our poetry, leading our literature, has become polyglot and universal and, like art and science, is fast becoming first national and The war, possibly the last great then international. struggle of nationalism, has helped to weld these scattered, cosmopolitan elements in a loose but sturdy Americanism and thus ("for the best of America," to repeat Whitman, "is the best cosmopolitanism") has given all our work a wider and even an international significance.

For, though all these poets differ in choice of theme, in treatment and temper, still they are united by many native though unconscious bonds. Most of them are stirred by and reflect the two powerfully creative impulses of our day—its restlessness and analysis. Most

of these poets are an active part of a new impetus and fervor; the careless singer has become a complex and searching individual. He is determined to know his world and to realize it completely. He does something more than accept the ready-made glamor and formulae of beauty that have been handed down to him. He questions them. He is going by himself to look for beauty, in strange places possibly; but he is going to find it . . . even if he has to wrest it from things that were neglected or trivial, or plunge for it into the dark cavern of the ugly and subconscious.

Poetry, to the living lover of it, is today less a narcotic and more of a nourishment. He struggles after it with a nervous energy. In his vigorous skepticism and all-absorbing interest, one can see how sweeping the change has actually been. The transformation in America has taken on the quality of a quiet revolution a revolt against mere pleasantry and prettiness. before the war, our modern skald did not feel it his duty to face life with a sweet smile of easy optimism: today the voice of the chronically pleasant poet sounds doubly pitiful. In his liberation from moldy conventions and stale sentimentality, the artist has achieved a clarity of vision that is as fresh as it is intellectually frank. The past, glorious in accomplishment and eternally enshrined, is not necessarily the altar for the future; and our day has seen the artist in every sphere rise from his idolatrous worship and look with cleared eyes at old and breathless mysteries. The changing circumstances of existence demand a fresh and constantly changing expression of even the fundamental realities. And no standard can be more sacred than an insistence on the honesty of a writer's own emotional reactions,

colored and conditioned by the shifting standards of the world. In his myriad discoveries the new poet is appealing to us less as a lover of art than as a lover of life. Like a child, he stands and studies not merely an accepted and ordered loveliness but anything that is curious, violent, sordid and yet (to him) significant. In an introductory chapter to *The Young Idea* (an interesting symposium concerning the spirit and aims of contemporary literature, published by Duffield & Co.) Lloyd R. Morris has written:

"In this discovery of the 'romance of the commonplace 'there is evident a riotous intoxication. In the true sense of the word it has been a discovery. and the poets having broken the bonds, whether fancied or real, which shackled them to a conventionally accepted relation to experience, have become drunk with life. They are experiencing a magic wonder at familiar things with something of the same penetrating vision and instinctive truthful reaction we find in children who are called upon to adjust themselves for the first time to a new situation of which they have previously been told Wonder comes with difficulty to the sophisticated soul. . . . And the person whom convention has taught what he should and what he should not see, is likely to be ashamed of and to suppress the immediate and natural reaction to experience which either disconcerts or charms us when it is expressed by a childlike mind. The poets are the childlike minds of our day. They are discovering to us what we might discover for ourselves had we their vision and courage."

This poetic feeling for ordinary life, foretold by Whitman in America and Synge in Ireland, is prevalent again. The poet's creative curiosity leads him everywhere and his liberal love for the whole world, not a part of it, impels and uplifts him. He portrays even the casual and coarse strength of life and shows that "what is exalted or tender is not made by feeble blood." He sees the amazing vitality beneath what seems merely vociferous; he knows the shining health that is in the heart of vulgarity. And it is this sweeping intensity, this sharp analysis that vivifies all incidents and emotions, that reveals the commonplace in fresh and startling colors

There are poets no doubt, even in America today, who can live unstirred by these things within their world. But the living poet who definitely desires to escape them is rare, a creature to be wondered at rather than scorned. He is not really a coward. He is much too bewildered and baffled for so actual a rôle. He is a timorous ghost, a living anachronism. He dwells among the half-lights, with the shadows, the soft echoes of poetry; not with poetry itself. For poetry in these days is something more than a graceful literary escape from life. It is a spirited encounter with it.

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INDEX

Names of Persons and Groups are in Roman. Titles of Books are in Italics.

Abercrombie, Lascelles, 133, 279, A Book of Prefaces, 7 A Boy's Will, 20-22, 33 A Branch of May, 282 Adams, Francis, 194, 222 A Dome of Many-Colored Glass, 140-141 Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty, 65, 71 A Family Album, 255-260 A Handy Guide for Beggars, 71 A History of Chinese Literature, 210 Aiken, Conrad, 330-338, 356 Akins, Zoë, 263, 275-276 Aldington, Richard, 153, 213, 296, 297 America's Coming of Age, 5 An American Anthology, 9 An American Primer, 12, 98, 100 An Ode to Harvard and Other Poems, 252 Apollinaire, G., 84 A Quiet Road, 282 Arensberg, Walter C., 324-325, 326 Arrows in the Gale, 185-195 Asbury, Samuel, 66-67
Asphalt and Other Poems, 316-317 Balzac, 276 Beardsley, Aubrey, 68, 325, 327 Benét, Stephen Vincent, 248, 354 Benét, William Rose, 241-252, 356 Bodenheim, Maxwell, 213, 326-Braithwaite, W. S., 111 Branch, Anna Hempstead, 263, 276-**2**81 Brody, Alter, 255-261 Brooks, Van Wyck, 5, 6, 11 Brown, Alice, 289

Browning, Robt., 111, 161, 181, 202, 203, 246 Bryant, W. C., 5 Burr, Amelia J., 263, 284-285 Bynner, Witter, 252-254, 263, 323 Calverley, C. S., 126 Can Grande's Castle, 153-158 Cannell, Skipwith, 296, 297, 311, 326 Captain Craig, 116-120 Carnevali, Emanuel, 354 Carroll, Lewis, 242 Chesterton, G. K., 142, 207, 247 Chicago Poems, 96-104 Child of the Amazons, 350 Children of the Night, 112-116, 129 Cleghorn, Sara N., 289 Coates, Archie A., 354 Coleridge, S. T., 280 Conkling, Grace Hazard, 263. Cooper, Fenimore, 7 Corbin, Alice, 354 Cornhuskers, 104-109 Craig, Gordon, 214 Crane, Stephen, 313 Crapsey, Adelaide, 108, 311, 318-320 Curran, Edwin, 351-353 "D., H.," 296, 297-301, 303 Daniel, Arnaut, 202 Dante, 142 Dargan, Olive Tilford, 263, 290 Davies, Mary Carolyn, 263, 311, 328 Davis, Fannie Stearns, 289 De la Mare, Walter, 14, 306 Des Imagistes, 295-297 Deutsch, Babette, 354 Dickinson, Emily, 319 Dobson, Austin, 126 Dr. Rast, 54 **361**

Index

Driscoll, Louise, 289 Dudley, Dorothy, 354

Earth Triumphant and Other Tales, 331-333 Eastman, Max, 350-351, 356 Edman, Irwin, 354 Eliot, T. S., 213, 310, 326 Emerson, R. W., 5, 7 Endicoff, Max, 346-347 Enjoyment of Poetry, 351 Erskine, John, 330 Exultations, 202, 212

Factories, 283-284
Fenollosa, Ernest, 207
Ficke, Arthur Davison, 323, 330
Firkins, O. W., 163
First Poems, 351-353
Fletcher, John Gould, 213, 297, 301-307, 321
Flexner, Hortense, 354
Flint, F. S., 296, 297, 310
Fort, Paul, 154
Frank, Florence Kiper, 290
Freud, Dr. S., 45, 59, 127, 176, 326, 334
Frost, Robert, 15-39, 41, 65, 111, 216, 294, 355, 356

General William Booth Enters into Heaven, 72-77, 81 Giles, Herbert, 210 Giovannitti, Arturo, 183-199, 231, 356 Goblins and Pagodas, 305-306 Goethe, 142 Gould, Wallace, 354 Greek, Anthology, The, 162 Grenstone Poems, 252-254 Guiney, Louise Imogene, 263

Hackett, Francis, 307
Hagedorn, Hermann, 330
Harris, Frank, 130, 179
Harte, Bret, 344
Hawthorne, N., 7
Heine, Heinrich, 10, 50, 95, 207, 226, 227, 228
Helen of Troy and Other Poems, 264-266
Helton, Roy, 338-342
Henley, W. E., 215, 219
Herrick, Robert, 10

Hiroshige, 158
Hodgson, Ralph, 229, 339, 340
Hokusai, 155
Holmes, O. W., 9
Hooker, Brian, 330
Hovey, Richard, 9
Hoyt, Helen, 320, 328, 354
Huneker, James, 138

Imagists, the, 111, 139, 257, 291-308 In Deep Places, 284 Interpretations, 275-276 Irradiations—Send and Spray, 303, 304 Irving, Washington, 7

Japanese Prints, 307 Jew, as artist, 50-51, 255 Johns, Orrick, 263, 315-317 Joyce, James, 296, 297 Jung, Dr. C. G., 45, 59

Keats, 14, 242 Keller, Helen, 185 Kemp, Harry, 354 Kilmer, Joyce, 111 Knibbs, Henry H., 344-345 Kreymborg, Alfred, 295, 313-315, 324, 325, 328

Lanier, Sidney, 329
Lanterns in Gethsemane, 342-344
Lawrence, D. H., 297
Leaves of Grass, 12, 98, 109, 215
Lee, Muna, 263
Leonard, Wm. Ellery, 330
Lincoln, Abraham, 121, 306
Lindsay, Vachel, 65-93, 162, 242, 248, 263, 294, 356
Li-Po, 158
Locker-Lampson, F., 126
Long, Haniel, 354
Longfellow, H. W., 6, 7
Love and Liberation, 225-229
Love Songs, 269-271
Lowell, Amy, 119, 137-159, 183, 248, 292, 295, 300, 356
Lowell, James Russell, 5
Loy, Mina, 311-312
Lustra, 206-212

Macdowell, Edward, 4 Mackaye, Percy, 329

Index

Markham, Edwin, 330 Marquis, Don, 354 Masefield, John, 95-96, 151, 294, 331, 332, 334, 339 Masters, Edgar Lee, 111, 116, 161-181, 183, 295, 333, 356 Maximilian, 161 Mellen, Grenville, 231 Men, Women and Ghosts, 148-Mencken, H. L., ? Merchants from Cathay, 241-244 Merlin, 132-134 Michelson, Max, 354 Millay, Edna St. Vincent, 263, 271-275 Miller, Joaquin, 344 Monday Morning and Other Poems, 42-44 Monroe, Harriet, 162, 263, 288-289 Moody, Wm. Vaughn, 329 Moore, Marianne, 312, 325 Morgan, Angela, 263 Morley, Christopher, 354 Morris, Lloyd R., 358 Mountain Interval, 19, 31-36, 38, Mushrooms, 313-315

Neihardt, J. G., 263, 329, 356 Nevins, Ethelbert, 4 New England Group, 5-9, 15, 29, 143, 176, 341 Nocturne of Remembered Spring, 336-337 North of Boston, 21, 22-31, 33 Norton, Grace Fallow, 290 Noyes, Alfred, 242 Nietzsche, Fr., 155

O'Neil, David, 326, 354 Oppenheim, James, 41-64, 65, 90, 238, 265, 356 "Others," 295, 309-328 Others; An Anthology, 311-313, 315-316, 317, 324-328 Outcasts in Beulah Land, 338-342

Pavannes and Divisions, 207 Peabody, Josephine Preston, 329 Personæ, 202, 212 Poe, E. A., 7, 9, 14, 84, 218 Poems About God, 354
Poems and Translations, 16, 95
"Poetry"; A Magazine, 162, 287
Portraits and Protests, 289
Pound, Ezra, 145, 162, 201-214, 297
Profiles from China, 287
Provença, 202-206
Provençal poets, 202, 206
Ransom, John Crowe, 354

Ransom, John Crowe, 354 Reed, Edward B., 80 Reedy, Wm. Marion, 162, 163. **32**I Reese, Lizette Woodworth, 263, 281-282 Renascence and Other Poems, 271-275 Rhymes to be Traded for Bread, 66, 69 Rice, Cale Young, 330 Riders of the Stars, 344 Ridge, Lola, 347-350 Rittenhouse, Jessie B., 263, 289 Rivers to the Sea, 266-269 Robinson, E. A., 111-134, 179, 215, 294 Rose of the Wind, 279-280

Sandburg, Carl, 95-109, 162, 163, 215, 258, 295, 318, 355 Sassoon, Siegfried, 294 Scriabin, 305 Sea Garden, 298-301 Shakespeare, Wm., 95, 130, 161, 181 Six French Poets, 138 Some Imagist Poets, 291, 298, 306 Songs and Satires, 173-175 Songs for the New Age, 45-53 Songs of the Army of the Night, 194 Spectra, 321-323 Spectrists, the, 320-323 Spoon River Anthology, 116, 161, 162-173, 177, 180, 333 Stedman, E. C., 9 Sterling, George, 330 Stevens, Wallace, 317-318 Storer, Edward, 126

Stork, Chas. Wharton, 354 Stravinsky, Igor, 152

The Answering Voice, 271 Tι The Art of the Moving Picture, T_{ℓ} Tı The Ballad of Reading Gaol, 190 $T_{\mathbf{i}}$ The Beloved, 54-56 The Beloved Adventure, 219-225 The Book of Self, 59-63
The Burglar of the Zodiac, 241, Ur Ut Uŧ 249-251 The Charnel Rose, 338
The Chinese Nightingale, 86-92 VaVic The Communist Manifesto, 191 Vil The Congo and Other Poems, 78-86, 88 W_a The Door of Dreams, 289 Wa The Falconer of God, 244-248 Wh The Ghetto and Other Poems, 2 347-349 Wh The Golden Book of Springfield, Wh 65, 71 The Great Valley, 173, 175-177 12 IC The Great White Wall, 248-249 Whi The Human Fantasy, 215-219, 230 Wic The Jig of Forslin, 334-336 Wid The Man Against the Sky, 124-129, 130, 132, 134 The Man with the Hoe, 330 28 Will "The New Poetry," 286
The New Republic, 211, 294
The New World, 252
The Poet in the Desert, 231-239 Will 29, Wor Woo Woo The Porcupine, 124 Wya⁻ The Seven Arts. 157

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